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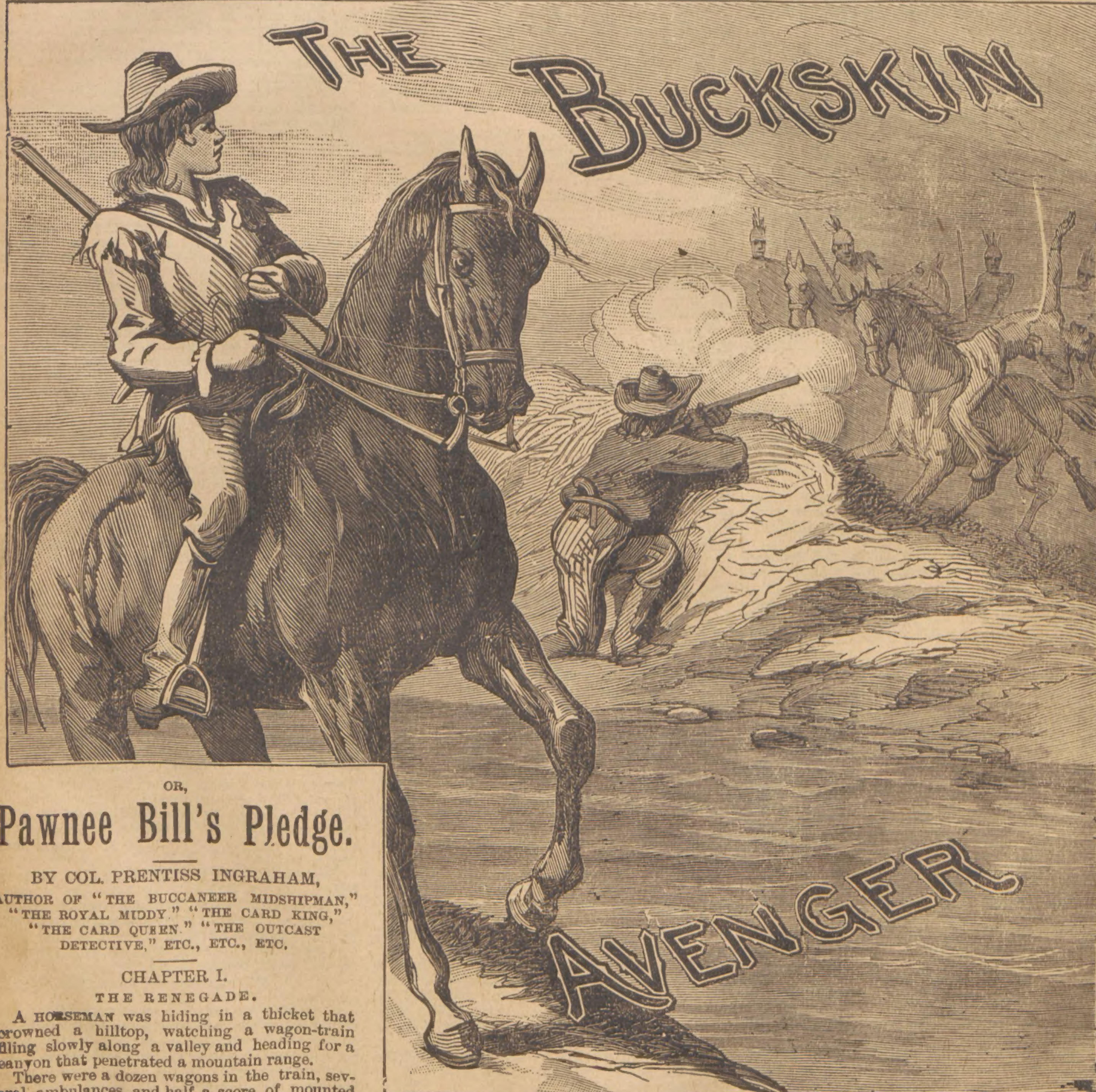
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OR, Pawnee Bill's Pledge.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE BUCCANEER MIDSHIPMAN,"
"THE ROYAL MIDDY," "THE CARD KING,"
"THE CARD QUEEN," "THE OUTCAST
DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE RENEGADE.

A HORSEMAN was hiding in a thicket that crowned a hilltop, watching a wagon-train filing slowly along a valley and heading for a canyon that penetrated a mountain range.

There were a dozen wagons in the train, several ambulances, and half a score of mounted men, who were doubtless guards, for they were dressed in army uniform.

PAWNEE BILL HAD HALTED ON THE OTHER SHORE TO SEE THE SURGEON SCOUT
GET IN HIS WONDERFUL WORK.

An officer wearing the insignia of a paymaster in the United States Army rode at the head of the men who were mounted, and upon his face was an anxious look, for he knew that he carried in the ambulance many thousand dollars, and that he was passing through a country doubly dangerous, as his command was a small one, and roving bands of red-skins might pounce upon him at any moment, while the trail was known to be also infested with road-agents who would make a desperate fight for the gold, if they knew the train carried it.

It was true that the paymaster had been warned of danger ahead, and that help would be at hand.

But would that help be on hand when needed?

He was approaching the spot where he was to expect an attack, if anywhere, and yet he saw no sign of either friend or foe.

The horseman who was watching the train, from his place of concealment in the thicket, was a man who appeared to be one who could shine in a metropolitan drawing-room, rather than join in the life of peril upon the border.

His horse was a superb animal, and stood as motionless as a statue, while his hide was as black as ebony and shone like glass.

He seemed proud of his silver-bespangled saddle and bridle, and his eyes were also upon the train.

The rider sat in his saddle with the air of one who was at home there.

He wore a black sombrero pinned up on the left side with a gold star, and his dress was a black velvet jacket, gray silk shirt and buck-skin leggings, stuck in a handsome pair of cavalry boots, the heels being ornamented with spurs.

Gauntlet gloves were upon the small hands of the man, and altogether he looked like a frontier fop.

But his face was one to see and never forget.

His hair was black, waving, and worn long, falling gracefully upon his broad shoulders, while his eyes were blue as indigo, full of tenderness of expression, and strangely fascinating.

Every feature was as perfect as though carved out of marble, and one would wonder if such a splendid face could bide an evil heart.

His weapons were a repeating rifle, a pair of silver-mounted revolvers, bowie-knife and a large Colt's holster pistol.

He carried a field glass, a lariat hung to his saddle-bow, a small hatchet and a roll of blankets and other articles, as though he held himself in readiness for a long trip.

"If that train carries a cool hundred thousand, as I have been informed, I will be a rich man, and a month hence will find me far from here.

"I have about worn out my welcome on the border, and am becoming too well known from Nebraska to New Mexico, to remain long unrecognized.

"Yes, I must seek new fields, and having lived a wild life for years, I will visit Europe and enjoy my fortune.

"The truth is I am cornered; but with what I have laid by, and the money I get from that train, I can enjoy a short life and a merry one abroad.

"The train has nearly reached the canyon, and my men will soon strike their blow, so I must be ready to dash down to the scene."

As he spoke he took up his reins, settled himself well in his saddle, and wheeling his horse rode back through the thicket, over the ridge.

Rounding the hill, and still keeping in the timber, he came to a small cut through which ran a buffalo trail to the large canyon, through which the train would pass.

Soon came to his ears the voices of the drivers and the popping of the whips, and a moment after these sounds were drowned in the rattle of firearms and the yells of combatants.

"The Toll-takers are upon them!

"My fortune is in my grasp!

"Come, Black Chief; let us join in this strike for gold."

As he spoke he touched Black Chief with his spurs, and the noble animal darted forward with the speed of an arrow.

Down the ravine he flew, while above the rattle of his hoofs rose the sounds of a fierce combat.

"My God! what a fierce resistance the train is making!

"They had more men than that fool reported to me!" cried the horseman, and the next instant he dashed out into the ravine.

The sight that met his eyes caused him to rein his horse back with a look of horror.

The train had entered the canyon, and was

close alongside the canyon wall, while its defenders were in line before it.

Attacking them were a large number of wild-looking horsemen, all wearing masks, and they were falling into confusion, for from the mouth of the canyon and down it came half a hundred cavalrymen, each party led by a gallant officer.

The Toll-takers had caught the train in a trap, dashing out upon them from a ravine where they had been in ambush; but in turn, the outlaw horsemen had been surprised and hemmed in by the soldiers, who followed the train into the canyon, and also came rushing at them from a hiding-place further on.

But the man, whose fascinating face was womanly in its beauty, was not one to relinquish a purpose without a desperate struggle, and in spite of all odds he dashed toward the scene of conflict, covering his face with a mask as he did so, and calling out:

"Beat them off, you cowboy devils, and our fortune is made!"

But the Toll-takers were not able to hold their own, and seeing that all was lost the chief wheeled, and riding down two soldiers who attempted to head him off, he rushed for the ravine, through which he had come, at the utmost speed of his horse.

Once he glanced over his shoulder, and through his shut teeth came the words:

"I know that man who leads."

"It is Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout."

"Curses upon him!"

Up the ravine sped the outlaw chief, and as he reached the ridge he beheld upon his trail a horseman.

"Ha! the Surgeon Scout is following me!

"I have but one course now before me, and that is to turn renegade.

"Yes, I will go to the Sioux village and cast my lot with them—until I can get revenge for this day's work!"

CHAPTER II. AMONG THE SIOUX.

THE Indian sentinel of a Sioux village, located amid the mountains, saw a horseman far off on the plains, and coming toward the spur upon which he stood.

Several miles in his rear, nestled away among the wildest recesses of the mountain-range, was the village of his people, and between his tribe and danger he stood as a barrier.

He was upon a spur of the ridge, from which a view could be obtained far and wide over the valley and plain, and did a foe appear within the scope of his vision, he could readily give the alarm by sending a comrade back from his little camp to tell of danger.

Other Indian sentinels were stationed at different points, around the village, so that it would be difficult for a foe to approach secretly, and, forewarned, the red-skins could be ready to beat off a large force ere they could reach the mountains.

The horseman seen by the Indian sentinel out upon the plains gave him no uneasiness.

He feared not danger from one man; but yet he gazed upon him with considerable interest, for a searching glance showed him that he was not of his race.

As he drew nearer, the sentinel saw that the horse had been hard ridden, and more, that the rider was a white man.

Reaching a point at the base of the spur, the horseman came to a halt.

He did not see the Indian sentinel, but he seemed to know that he was there nevertheless, for he took from his pocket a red handkerchief, in the center of which were a pair of arrows worked in white porcupine-quills and crossed.

This little flag was placed upon a stick, which the horseman dismounted and cut with his hatchet, and then, remounting, he rode boldly up the hill.

The Indian did not change from his position, as he saw the act of the horseman, but kept his eye fixed upon him as he came on up the trail.

With rifle ready to greet foe, or friend, the red-skin awaited the horseman's approach.

He had the position for defense, and from it he could have kept at bay half a dozen men, for they would have been under his fire, from the nature of the winding trail, long before they could have returned a shot with any hope of success.

The sentinel seemed to have recognized the horseman, as he drew nearer, and said:

"White chief of Gold Braves."

As the horseman got to the top of the ridge the sentinel stepped out from his place of concealment and confronted him.

"You are here, Serpent, I see.

"I thought there was no one on guard, as I failed to see you."

"Me here," replied the Indian laconically.

"And the chief?"

"At village."

"I will ride on and see him."

"White Gold Chief all alone?"

"Yes."

"Big chief at village."

The horseman nodded and rode on, taking a trail that led up the ridge as though he had been over it before.

Some distance back he came to the little camp of the Indian sentinels.

There was a wicky-up to protect them from the rain, a camp-fire in a niche of rocks, and lariated out near were three ponies, for there were two braves in camp and the one on duty.

The two in the camp were playing some game together when the chief of the Toll-takers rode up, and nodded at him without a word.

If he had passed the man on duty they had nothing to say, and though he was unknown to them, they saw that he was alone, and, from what they had heard their comrades say about the white Gold Chief, the secret ally of their chief, they guessed who he was.

Straight along the trail rode the Gold Chief, until he came in sight of the village, and a large one it was, for there were hundreds of tepees in sight and many Indians of all ages from the decrepit old warrior and squaw to the smallest child.

As the horseman appeared in sight a perfect hush fell upon all, and the busy hum of voices, the shouts of children's laughter was silenced, while every eye was upon him.

Some of the timid ones were startled, fearing that the pale-faces had entered their mountain fastnesses; but the red flag, with its crossed arrows reassured them, for it told them that the visitor was a friend.

Straight to the large tepee of the big chief rode the outlaw captain, and many braves came to meet him, for he was known to a number of them.

The head chief of the tribe, a stern-faced man of fifty, rose and greeted his visitor with dignified welcome.

He wore all the insignia of his position, necklaces of grizzly bear claws to variegated feather headdress which gave him a most imposing look, and several of his chiefs were with him, they having evidently been concocting some choice bit of deviltry to be acted upon.

Between the captain of the Toll-takers and the chief there was a bond of friendship, for the Gold Chief, as the Indians called him, had thrown it in the way of the red-skins on a number of occasions to make an advantageous raid for themselves.

In fact he had been glad often to let the red-skins get the credit for the misdeeds of the Toll-takers, and some of the crimes of the white outlaw band had been committed under the paint and garb of Indians.

As the Gold Chief paid liberally, the Sioux were his friends, and as on several previous visits satisfactory raids had followed, they were glad to see him come, and to welcome him.

"My white brother is welcome to the home of my people.

"He has come fast and ridden hard," said the chief.

"You are right, chief, I have, and for good cause, as the soldiers ruined me," was the reply.

"The pale-face braves have fought my white brother?" asked the Indian chief in surprise.

"Yes, they have attacked me, captured and killed my young men, robbed me of my property and I only have escaped."

"I have come to you, chief, to ask you to make me one of your braves, to give me a name among your people, who shall, from this day be my people."

The chief and his warriors were glad to hear this.

They welcomed the black sheep into their fold joyfully, for they knew that he would be of immense assistance to them.

"My white brother is welcome, and my people will be his people."

"He has been a great chief among his braves, and he shall be a chief here."

"Let my warriors assemble at the grand Council Tepee to make our white brother a chief among us," and at the word of the old chief a grim smile passed over the face of the renegade white man, who had renounced his own race to become an Indian, a man courtly as a prince, handsome, wonderfully gifted, but so stained with crime that he was forced to fly to savages to hide from the vengeance of his own people.

"It is the first step toward my revenge.

"I will strike hard, and then I will secure my buried treasure and fly to other lands.

"But first I must strike my cruelest blow at those who destroyed me in the moment of my hope that success would crown my efforts after all my years of struggling against Fate.

"How will it all end?

"Why, as I would have it end, of course," and into his eyes came a light as baleful as the glare of a snake's eyes when about to strike with his poisonous fangs.

CHAPTER III.

THE MERCILESS TRAILER.

THE one whom the chief of the Toll-takers had seen coming upon his trail was a man of equally as striking appearance as was the outlaw leader.

He was the commander of the party of soldiers, in the attack upon the Toll-takers, surprising them where they had, as they believed, surprised the wagon-train.

Though he wore the rank of an army surgeon, and held such position at the fort, he was also noted as a daring, dashing officer to command army expeditions when courage and prairie-craft were needed.

He had passed years upon the plains, and in the mountains, and, as the close comrade of Buffalo Bill, had won fame as a scout and Indian-fighter.

Circumstances, which will be made known later on, led up to the attack upon the Toll-takers, and Surgeon Frank Powell, also called the Surgeon Scout, was the one whom the colonel commanding at the fort had thought best to command the expedition, a handsome, gallant young officer, Lieutenant Carter Cameron, being second in rank.

When it was seen that the chief of the Toll-takers had escaped, Surgeon Powell at once struck his trail; but he had not gone very far before he halted and turned back.

A man of superb physique, he had a face to command respect and admiration anywhere.

He was dressed in an undress uniform jacket, wore high boots, leggings, and a sombrero encircled by a gold cord, while shoulder-straps denoted his rank and branch of service.

He carried splendid weapons, a repeating rifle hanging at his back.

His horse was a superb animal, long-bodied, sinewy and indicating speed and bottom far above the average.

Riding back to the canyon, Surgeon Powell approached the handsome young lieutenant, who was looking at the results of his victory.

"Cameron, we have done well; but Kent Kingdon, the chief, has escaped, and his trail has started him off toward the mountains, so I suppose he will go and join the Sioux.

"I shall at once follow him, so you take full command."

"But you will not go alone, Surgeon Powell?" asked the lieutenant with anxiety.

"Oh yes, for it would be worse than madness to take any one else.

"You had better take an escort, when you have started the train on its way to the foot, and go to the ranch of this infamous outlaw chief, and rescue his poor young wife and your sister.

"Take them to the fort with you, and they will be safe."

"I know not how to thank you, Surgeon Powell, for all that you have done in this matter.

"You have certainly shown yourself a wonderful detective, to track this man Kingdon as you have, and you it is that has restored to me, for I shall soon see her, the sister that I have so long believed was dead.

"But I beg you not to go alone on this trail after Kent Kingdon," and the lieutenant spoke feelingly.

"I feel that I can do better alone, Cameron; but should I not return, look over my affairs at the fort and arrange according to my written requests, for I always live ready for death," and the surgeon smiled.

Soon after, with food enough to last several days, and prepared for camping with comfort at night, Surgeon Powell grasped the hand of his young friend and rode away from the canyon.

He did not ride at a rapid pace, seeming to know that the Toll-taker captain was well-mounted; but went slowly along, following the trail of the outlaw.

As long as the country was open, the trail leading over the plains, he followed it closely; but toward night he drew near the hill land, and his experience in border life warned him to go with care.

It was such an easy thing for the bold outlaw, seeing him upon his track, to lie in ambush and kill him as he came up.

"His trail certainly leads to the mountains, and where else would he go but to the Sioux, who have been his allies in more than one act of devilry.

"He saw that his band was annihilated, or made prisoners, he dare not return to his ranch, now that he is known to have been the chief of the Toll-takers, and his pretended cowboys were his outlaw band, so there is but one course for him to pursue, and that is to turn renegade.

"This trail proves to me that such is his intention, so I will give him no chance to lie in wait and shoot me down.

"No, I'll strike for Wolf Creek and I can then see if he has crossed it."

So saying the Surgeon Scout dismounted, examined the hoof-marks of the outlaw's horse thoroughly, and then went on his way, but turning off at an oblique from the trail, and entering the hill-country several miles from the spot where the chief had done so.

That night he camped in a small glade, where he found plenty of grass and water, and at daylight was again pressing untiringly on.

In the afternoon he came to the banks of a small stream.

But the banks were precipitous, the current swift and the stream quite deep, so that fords were sought to cross to the other side.

The trailer found himself at a ford, which he had struck for, as he knew the country well, and dismounting he examined the approach to it most carefully.

"He has not crossed here," he muttered, and mounting his horse he rode along the banks of the stream to another ford some miles away.

Here he soon found the trail he was in search of.

He knew the hoof-tracks of the outlaw's horse too well to make any mistake.

"As I thought, he has gone to the Sioux village.

"Well, I will go there, too, and I will see that Kent Kingdon meets the fate he deserves.

"I will be merciless to him, for he deserves not one atom of mercy at the hands of man or woman."

So saying, the daring trailer mounted his horse and rode on toward the Indian village, as boldly as though the Sioux were not the bitterest foes of the whites, and his hands were not stained with the blood of their young warriors whom he had slain in battle.

CHAPTER IV.

A DUEL AMONG THE SIOUX.

THE same Indian sentinel who had discovered the approach of the Toll-taker chief, also saw Surgeon Powell coming across the plains.

He saw that he was not an Indian scout, and more, he recognized that he was a white man.

As he drew nearer he seemed to recognize him, for he said quietly:

"Big medicine chief, White Beaver.

"Come see Sioux chief.

"Heap brave man."

He was correct in his surmise, as well as in his remark that Surgeon Powell was a brave man.

Some months before, when on a scouting expedition alone, the surgeon had entered a timber motte to camp for the night, when an arrow had whizzed by his head.

At once he was on guard, revolver in hand, and yet he did not fire, for he saw that the one who fired the shot had sent his last arrow at him and lay wounded in a thicket.

It was the big chief of the Sioux, and his leg was broken by a bullet, received in a fight with soldiers a day or two before.

The pony of the chief was not far distant, but the poor red-skin would have died there in the thicket but for the coming of the Surgeon Scout.

Speaking the Indian tongue well, he told the chief that he did not make war upon those in distress, and he took him in his arms and carried him to a spring near by.

Then he skillfully dressed his wound, removed the particles of broken bone and braced the leg with splints, for he never went without his surgical case.

The chief was amazed, for he had expected death at the hands of the man whom he had persistently fought for years.

He was cared for, fed, and placed on a comfortable bed of leaves for the night.

His pony was caught and brought to the camp, and the next day, by easy trips, the scout began the march for the Sioux village, boldly

risking his life to carry the chief back to his people.

The red-skins greeted their chief warmly, for they had given him up for dead, and gazed in wonder at the mighty "medicine-man" who had dared to face them in their village.

But Frank Powell had traded on his knowledge of the Indian character, and felt that he would not be harmed.

His surmise was a correct one, for he spent some time in the red-skin village, attending faithfully to the chief, and also looking after others whom the native medicine-men said must die.

The hold that this gave the Surgeon Scout upon the Sioux was remarkable, and when he did depart for the fort, he was loaded down with gifts, and had been given a robe of white beaver skins* and also named after that animal.

Given up for lost by his comrades, the Surgeon Scout rode into the fort one day and made his adventure known, while he had also gotten a good deal of information for the colonel-commanding, which was most important.

So it was that the Surgeon Scout dared to again trust himself in the Sioux village.

His war was not against the red-skins there, but against one whose heart was blackened by foulest crimes, whose life was one sin against his fellow-men and women.

If he went to the Sioux village, and told the chief that he had come there to fight his white foe, the outlaw captain, would not the Indians feel that he had a right to do so?

So Powell thought, and boldly he rode up the ridge trail.

He held no peace flag, as had Kent Kingdon, but went on at the risk of being fired upon.

But the Indian sentinel recognized him, for, when in the village the Surgeon Scout had extracted a bullet from his shoulder for him, and had thus allowed a bad wound to heal.

Up to the thicket rode the scout, and he knew that a sentinel was there, though he did not see him.

Then the red-skin came forward, and said:

"The White Beaver comes again to the home of his red friends?"

"Yes, I would know if the chief is well?"

"The chief is well," was the reply.

"And your people?"

"Are well."

"There is a pale-face among your people?"

"How knows the White Beaver this?"

"I have followed his trail."

"He is a man with a bad heart and false tongue, for he is a renegade to his own people."

"Is he in the Sioux village?"

"Yes."

"He is the friend of your chief?"

"Yes, the big chief bids him welcome."

"I have come here to meet him, to force him to fight me."

The red-skin seemed pleased at this.

A fight between two pale-faces would be a diversion that all must enjoy.

"The white chief is at the village," he said.

"Will the Panther go there with me?"

The Panther wished to do just that very thing, so he cast a searching glance over the plains, to see that a regiment was not following the Surgeon Scout, and mounting his pony, rode on to the outpost camp along with the daring visitor.

There he told one of the two Indians there to take his place at the point of outlook, and continued on with the pale-face.

The surgeon was known the moment he entered the village, and his coming created a sensation.

But he held on his way to the Council Teepee, and suddenly confronted the big chief, his under chief, and many warriors.

There, too, was Kent Kingdon, the renegade, and he sprung to his feet at sight of the officer.

He would have opened fire upon him, too, but that those about him prevented his doing so, and then the Surgeon Scout was also ready for action had the renegade leveled his revolver.

"Chief and brother, I am again in your camp, and I have come to ask you to let that man, my foe, fight to the death here before you and your braves," and Surgeon Powell spoke in the Sioux tongue, as he suddenly confronted the Indian chief.

For the officer the chief held really a kind feeling in his heart, for he knew all that he owed him; but for the renegade he had only a selfish interest, according to what he could get through him in the way of plunder.

* The white beaver is a sacred animal among the Indians. Surgeon Powell alone bears the name.

THE AUTHOR.

So he said:

"My white brother has trusted his life in our hands in coming to my village, and among my people he is safe."

"But why would he meet his pale-face brother in battle?"

"That man, chief, is a renegade to his people, and I have followed his trail to your village, and one of us must die."

"Will the Gold Chief fight my white brother?" asked the Indian chief, turning to Kent Kingdon.

"Yes, now, or when he pleases, and with whatever weapons he may choose," was the remark of Kent Kingdon, and he spoke in the easy, reckless manner peculiar to him.

"You are armed, sir, with revolvers, so take your stand twenty paces from me, and let us walk toward each other, firing as we advance, to begin when the chief gives the word."

"I am content."

Frank Powell then explained in Sioux what had been said, and the two men took their positions, the braves looking on with the deepest interest, and their sympathy with the outlaw, who had become one of their tribe.

"Kent Kingdon, one word to you," said Surgeon Powell, as they faced each other.

"Well, sir?"

"You know who I am, and you are aware that I know you as you are, and that your life is a lie."

"You have done much wrong in the world, and I now wish to avenge those whom you have wronged, and here in this awful moment, you must see the phantoms of those you have slain appear before you."

"I am ready, sir."

"What word shall I send to the fort, Surgeon Powell, about your death, for I shall kill you, and what shall be done with your body?" demanded the outlaw with a sneer.

Powell made no reply, but called out to the Indian chief:

"I am ready, chief."

The chief then gave the word to fire, and the two revolvers flashed, but the Surgeon Scout pulled trigger a second before Kent Kingdon, who staggered forward, as his revolver dropped from his hand, and he fell, clutching wildly at the air.

In the confusion that followed, the Surgeon Scout, whose cheek had been grazed by the bullet of the Gold Chief, mounted his horse and rode away from the village, under the guidance of Panther, the red-skin sentinel.

CHAPTER V.

PAWNEE BILL.

ABOUT a year before the scenes related in the foregoing chapters, a horseman was riding along a trail that ran through a hill country.

A glance was sufficient to show that the horseman was Kent Kingdon, then known in the settlement thereabouts as a cattle ranchero, and respected as a man of honor, though secretly the leader of the Toll-takers, the band being composed of his own cowboys.

Suddenly, and without warning, two lariat coils flew from behind some rocks, and settled down over the heads of the man and his horse.

The animal bounded forward, but was brought up so suddenly that he was thrown heavily, while the man was dragged from his saddle to the ground with stunning force.

Ere the horseman could extricate himself from the lariat, three men sprung from behind the rocks and threw themselves upon him.

Kent Kingdon was a Hercules in strength; but, half-stunned, his arms confined by the lariat, and with three against one, he was powerless, and in an instant was disarmed and bound.

His captors were a hard-looking trio.

Their faces were heavily bearded, their hair worn long and hanging in tangled masses about their brutish faces, while their clothes were of the roughest material and well worn.

They all were well armed, and over beyond the pile of rocks, where they had been lying in wait for their victim, were three good horses.

"What does this mean, you devils?" savagely asked Kingdon, as he glared upon his captors and recognized them as members of his own band.

"It means, cap'n, that the game has gone one way a leetle too long. You lives in clover, has a fine home, handles plenty o' dust, and is ter marry a pretty leetle lady as don't know yer as yer is—"

"Well!"

"And we is cowboys, in public, and Toll-takers when we has our masks on, while we gits mighty little cream."

"I pay you well, don't I?"

"Not accordin' to services, and so we three pards hev saved up our leetle earnings and intends ter light out fer home afore we gits hanged."

"You would desert me?"

"We was honest men aforo we come West, Pard Cap'n; but we got demoralized, and luck didn't turn our way, so we went inter ther road-agent biz, yer see; but now we wants ter quit bizness afore we is forced to suspend at ther end o' a rope, and we wants money to quit on that will add to our leetle pile."

"When you jined our band and come to be chief, why, we all knowed you had some dust hid away, for you was just from the mines, that you didn't turn over to us."

"Waal, whar you has it we must know, and so we jist lariated you, hopin' you'd tell us; and if yer does, we'll let yer go."

"If I refuse?"

"We'll hang you, dead sure!"

The outlaw captain laughed. Evidently he did not believe the three men would carry out their threat.

"You thinks we won't?"

"I know it."

"Why won't we hang you?"

"You dare not."

"Who has we to be afeerd of?"

"The rest of the band would soon be on your trail."

"It's catchin' afore hangin', pard."

"Yas, an i we has catched you!" said another of the men, who had not before spoken.

"You will not dare carry out your threat."

"Will you tell us where you hid your gold-dust, the day you became chief of the Toll-takers?"

"How do you know that I had any?"

"We knows it."

"I will not tell you."

"Then you hangs."

The outlaw captain again laughed.

The three men looked at each other a moment, then whispered some minutes together, and one of them tying a stone to the end of a lariat threw it over a stout limb above his head.

The end was then made into a noose and this was placed over the head of their captain, who smiled defiantly, still believing that the men had no idea of hanging him in earnest.

"You won't tell, Pard Cap'n?" asked the man who had been spokesman.

"Fools! I have no gold-dust or money hidden away."

"Oh, yes you has, for now and then you has paid us in dust an' bills, and thar hain't no mines ner banks in these parts for you to get it from."

"Well, if I have you won't get it," was the determined response.

The act of the men was sudden, and certainly unexpected to their leader, for in a second they had seized hold of the other end of the rope and he was dragged into mid-air, his startled cry and a fierce oath being choked from his lips.

It was a moment when Kent Kingdon saw death before him, and in that instant of mortal agony every vile act of his life flashed before his vision.

Then to his ears came a dull sound, and then another, and before his blurred vision there rushed a horse and rider.

A cut upon the rope, and he dropped to the ground, almost insensible.

But he rallied quickly, and, bound as he was, staggered to his feet.

What he beheld surprised him.

Near him lay the spokesman of the trio who had hanged him, dead, while at one side stood the other two outlaws, their hands raised above their heads, while a young and handsome horseman confronted them, a revolver leveled at their heads.

"Glad to see you all right, sir! Come here and I will cut your bonds, and you can transfer them to those two gentlemen," said the horseman, coolly, and he pointed to the two men who stood with uplifted hands.

Kent Kingdon, with face black from his choking and rage combined, stepped to the side of the horseman, who, still keeping his revolver leveled with one hand, with the other cut with his bowie-knife, the lariat that bound the arms of the man behind him.

"Now tie those fellows, sir."

Kingdon promptly stepped forward, while one of the men called out:

"Say, young pard, thet are ther pilgrim to tie for he's ther devil hisself!"

"His looks belie him then, while your faces show cut-throat clear through."

"He's a road-agent," shouted one of the men.

"I caught you doing road-agent work," was the reply; at which Kingdon laughed.

"Young pard, I'll tell you all about it, and then you'll help us to hang him."

But Kent Kingdon quickly dealt the speaker a blow that stunned him, and in a moment he had bound them both and also forced a gag into their mouths.

Then he turned to the horseman and said:

"These men, sir, are cowboys on my ranch, where I shall be most happy to entertain you."

"They knew that I had a sum of money with me to-day, so attempted to hang me, as you saw, and I owe to you my escape from an awful death."

"My name is Kent Kingdon, sir, and my ranch is not very far from here."

"May I ask the name of the one to whom I owe so much?"

"My name is Gordon Lillie, sir; but I am called on the border Pawnee Bill* was the answer not doubting for a moment but that he had rescued an honest ranchero from his lawless cowboys."

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG GUIDE.

THE outlaw captain gazed upon his rescuer with decided interest.

He had heard the name of Pawnee Bill spoken of around many a camp-fire, and it was said to be that of a daring young fellow, whom the Pawnees had made a chief of their tribe.

He had heard also that Pawnee Bill, though a very young man, a mere youth in fact, was a noted guide and scout and knew all the Indian tribes well, while he could speak their languages and out-Indian them in cunning.

"Ah! I have heard of you, sir, for the name of Pawnee Bill is often spoken in the mines and settlements."

"Again I thank you for the service rendered me, and I feel that, but for you, I would now be dead."

"Will you accompany me to my ranch?"

"No, thank you, sir, for I am hurrying through the country with dispatches for the fort."

"Then may I ask if you will leave me to look after these prisoners?"

"Yes, sir, and the dead man, for I shot him in self-defense, as he fired on me when I dashed up."

"I was riding along, little expecting to meet any one here, when I saw you drawn up into mid-air, over the hill-top, and I at once came to your rescue."

"You were plucky to face three to one."

"I had the advantage of a surprise, and I made them believe that I had help following me."

"But I must be off."

"You will not go to my home with me!"

"No, thank you, for I have not the time."

"I will stop on my way back, if I can."

"Pray do so, and a warm welcome will ever await you," and the outlaw captain held out his hand to the young guide, who grasped it warmly and said:

"Don't be hard on these two fellows, sir, for the scare has done them good."

Then he dashed away, disappearing over the hill-top.

The outlaw chief gazed after him in silent admiration.

At last he mused aloud:

"And that is the young dare-devil, Pawnee Bill, of whom I have so often heard."

"I have doubted many of the stories about him, but now I do not, for he is a wonderful fellow, handsome as an Apollo and with a look upon his face which plainly shows that he will venture anything."

The praise of the outlaw chief was not undeserved, for Gordon Lillie, whose sobriquet was Pawnee Bill, was certainly a most remarkable looking personage.

His form was about the medium height, well-knit and sinewy, while his movements were quick and decided.

He was dressed in buckskin leggings and hunting-jacket, blue woolen shirt, moccasins, and wore a gray felt sombrero.

About his neck were several necklaces of bear-claws, and a bunch of eagle-feathers were stuck in the side of his sombrero, as an indication that he was a chief of an Indian tribe.

* Gordon W. Lillie, now a resident of the Indian Territory and known as Boy Chief among the Pawnees. A Government Scout, Guide and Interpreter, also known as Pawnee Bill.

He carried a variety of arms, for he had a long slender lance, a quiver of arrows and long bow, a rifle, belt of revolvers and knife, and a long lariat hung at his saddle-bow.

Behind him had trotted a well-trained horse bearing a pack, containing his outfit, and the animal was never far from the one which Pawnee Bill rode, coming at the call of his master when needed.

A large gaunt hound, a cross between a Newfoundland and a bloodhound kept close to the heels of the pack-horse and looked as though he would prove a very dangerous enemy, or an able ally if his master needed his aid.

The pack-horse, and the dog had helped in the capture of the two outlaw cowboys, when Pawnee Bill dashed up and called out to them to throw up their hands.

Perhaps also the deadly aim of the young scout, in sending a bullet into the forehead of their comrade had been a strong incentive to their yielding.

The face of Pawnee Bill was strangely boyish, bright and sunny in expression, and yet it was full of courage and resolution.

His eyes were dark, and very expressive, his teeth white and even, and his hair golden in hue and wavy, hung below his shoulders.

Altogether he was a striking-looking youth, and his face indicated that he was one to do and dare all that was said of him.

As he disappeared from the view of the outlaw chief and his two prisoners, the latter turned an anxious look upon their leader.

They knew that he was a dangerous man when aroused, and they felt that they had done enough to arouse him.

A few moments before they had held the winning hand.

Now matters were reversed, for one of their number lay dead at their feet, and they were securely bound and at the mercy of the man they had hanged, and meant to kill.

As they gazed upon his face, which was stern and threatening, their hearts sunk within them and hope for mercy fled.

CHAPTER VII.

A MAN WITHOUT MERCY.

WHEN the clatter of Pawnee Bill's horses had died away down the trail, Kent Kingdon aroused himself from his reverie.

He had been thinking of the youth, and his honest, daring face, and comparing it with his own, which, in spite of its beauty was the face of a fiend.

Never in his life before had he had such a close call to death.

He had faced it hundreds of times, and met with many narrow escapes, but he realized that but for the coming of Pawnee Bill he would have lost his life, and died on the end of a rope.

In spite of his indomitable nerve, he turned livid at the thought.

An encounter with revolvers at ten paces would not blanch his cheek; but this facing death at the rope's end was appalling to him.

He had been cleverly caught by the three cowboys of his band.

He had never particularly liked them, for they had seemed to be inseparable friends.

The trio were always together and their comrades had given them the name of the Trey of Hearts, and they were known to be selfish and mean except when one of the three was concerned.

Between each other they would share their last crust of bread, or dollar; but no one else could expect aught from them.

The chief, however, had not expected that they would be treacherous to the band.

Since he had come to the settlement some time before, bought a ranch and cattle, he had been the leader of the Toll-takers.

His brilliant brain had organized them into a secret band of outlaws, while they were supposed to be honest cowboys.

As they committed their lawless deeds under cover of a mask they were not known, and no one supposed for a moment that Kent Kingdon, the captain of the settlement rangers, organized for protection, was in reality the chief of the road-agents.

And yet so it was, and the outlaws were held together by a bond that had been kept unbroken until the trio, the Trey of Hearts, had decided to better their condition by robbing their leader and then flying from the country to other parts.

When the chief had roused himself from his reverie, he turned again to his prisoners.

"Well, so you decided to be treacherous to me, did you?"

"Cap'n, we didn't do you no harm, so let up on us," said one of the two.

"You would have killed me, but for that brave young scout, and as it is, I'll feel the rope about my throat for days to come."

"You would be better off if you were like that," and he kicked the dead body at his feet.

"Pard, you hain't goin' ter kill us, is yer?"

"Yes."

"Lordy! don't do it, and we'll tie to you for life."

"We will indeed, cap'n, and you wont regret being merciful."

"I do not know the meaning of the word merciful."

"Waal it are to fergive yer enemies, and ter let us go."

"I do not care to learn what mercy is at this late day in my life."

"Pard Cap'n, we has saved up a snug little sum, and our dead pard there, Rocks, he have also, and we'll turn it all over to you if you'll let us live."

The outlaw leader started at this.

The name of gold had a delightful ring to his ears, so he said:

"About how much have you saved up?"

"I has thirteen hundred."

"And I has a little more."

"And that fellow?"

"He hed two thousand, or thereabout."

"And you'll give it all to me if I spare you?"

"Yes, cap'n."

"Sart'in."

"Where is it?"

"We has it salted away up on the hill yonder."

"Why did you put it there?"

"Ter git it easy arter we had called in your chips."

"Ah, I see!"

"Waal, pard, say the word and the dust is yours."

"I need a certain sum of money, so that this will come in about right, and I'm inclined to spare you."

"Thankee, cap'n."

"Yas, I is obleeged too, Pard Cap'n."

"You will remain in my band if I spare you?"

"Yas."

"And this affair need not be spoken of to any one?"

"No, cap'n."

"I hain't anxious to talk about what has gone ag'in me."

"What excuse will you give about your dead comrade here?"

"We wont know nothing about his tarin' up his toes."

"Well, lead the way to where your gold is hidden."

"You means it, cap'n?"

"I do now, so be in a hurry or I may change my mind."

This encouraged the two men to hasten, and they stepped off at a lively gait up the hill.

A walk of several hundred yards brought them to an old tree and here they halted.

"You means it, Pard Cap'n?"

"I do."

"You wont go back on us?"

"No."

"Wal, here goes."

As this man spoke he stepped up to the tree and said:

"Pull them dead leaves out of that hole, cap'n."

The outlaw captain obeyed, and from a hole in the tree took out three bags of gold.

"That's the chink, cap'n!"

"I see it is."

"Now you just set us free, and you'll not have two men in your band will be as square as we is."

"I doubt it."

"Yer does?" and the two men looked alarmed, for they did not like the grim smile that suddenly came over the face of the outlaw leader.

"Yes, I believe a man who is treacherous once, is always a traitor."

"I have so found it to be the case with myself, and why should I trust you?"

"But, cap'n!"

"Yes, pard, don't skeer us."

"I intend to kill you both."

As he spoke Kent Kingdon deliberately drew his revolver.

The men turned deathly pale, and their captain laughed.

"Pard Cap'n, you wouldn't do such a thing?"

"I would, and I will, as you shall know."

"Mercy, cap'n!"

"Say, pard, don't put our lives on yer con-science, arter we has acted squar' with you."

"Your lives will weigh lightly upon my con-science, so do not worry about me."

"You were fools to tell me where your gold was; but I have it here, and now, I have you, and you must die, so say your prayers if you know any."

The two men saw determination to kill them in the face of the man.

They saw that he was a man without mercy, and they at once dropped upon their knees and appealed in piteous accents to him.

Not a muscle of his face changed, and his look was stern and resolute, as he bent his piercing gaze upon the two men.

At length he slowly raised his revolver.

He seemed to rejoice in the opportunity he had of causing them to show their great dread, at having them wholly at his mercy, with no power to strike back.

"I shall have an opportunity for practice that does not often present itself."

"I shall take advantage of it."

"Dick, I will clip your right ear for you."

As he spoke his pistol flashed, and the man uttered a howl of pain as the bullet cut through his left ear.

"Frank, I shall cut that cord on your hat."

The shot was well aimed, and a red cord around the slouch hat of the victim was cut, but the bullet grazed the scalp and the man fell forward upon his face half stunned.

Then came two other shots in rapid succession and the two men were slain, bullets having pierced their brains, the murderer undismayed by the loud pleadings for mercy from the unfortunate wretches.

With hardly a look at his dead victims, Kent Kingdon picked up the bags of gold, threw them into his saddle-bags and mounting his patiently awaiting horse, rode away from the fatal spot, his face still wearing that same grim smile that showed him to be a man without mercy.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAWNEE BILL IN AMBUSH.

WHEN Pawnee Bill dashed away from the scene, where he had rendered such timely service to Kent Kingdon, and slain the leader of the trio of pards, known as the Trey of Hearts, he sped rapidly along.

His pack-horse and dog followed close behind, and the gait that the young scout was going was a good one, for he was anxious to make up for lost time, as he was bearing dispatches to the fort.

He swept along the valley at the same rapid pace, out through a canyon to the prairies beyond, and thence on over the level plains, until many miles had been passed over.

At length, as the hour was near sunset he halted in a timber motte for rest and food.

His horses were watered at the edge of the timber, and then they were staked out in a little plot to feed, after which Pawnee Bill set about getting his own supper.

He intended to take several hours for sleep and then push on once more so that he could reach the fort about daybreak.

The timber was very thick, and there was plenty of dead wood lying about, so he soon collected some to light a fire.

But ere he applied the match he hesitated, for the actions of his dog showed him that something was wrong.

The dog had gone to the further end of the timber, some three hundred yards distant, and returned with a low whine and his hair bristling.

"What is it, Guard?" asked Pawnee Bill.

The dog uttered a low growl in answer, and walked off toward the further end of the timber.

Seizing his rifle Pawnee Bill followed, and he soon came to a spot from whence he could see far out upon the prairie.

There he beheld a party of horsemen, and they were coming toward the timber.

Going back to his saddle he got his field-glass, and returning leveled it upon the horsemen.

It was just sunset; but he saw that there were seven in the party, and one of these was a white man, the others were Indians.

"It is a soldier, for I can make out his uniform, and an officer, too, for I see his shoulder-straps," said Pawnee Bill.

Then he took a closer survey and was convinced that they were coming to the timber to camp.

"That soldier is a renegade, or a prisoner."

"I'll decide that he is the latter, and prepare accordingly."

So saying, he returned to his camp and quickly placed the saddle and pack-saddle upon his horses.

At the same time he took from the pack two muzzles and placed them over the nose of the horses, to prevent their scenting the coming party and by neighing betray his presence.

The animals were then led into a ravine, with their faces turned for flight, and Guard was stationed in front of them as though to prevent their running off, though the well-trained animals would hardly leave their master.

Still it was best to be on the safe side, and with all his recklessness in action, Pawnee Bill was cautious and cunning as an Indian.

The young scout then took his bow and arrows and slung them at his back, his lance having been made fast to his saddle.

Rifle in hand he crouched in a gully and waited the coming of the red-skins.

He knew his danger; but, if the white man proved to be a renegade, he would open fire upon the party with his repeating rifle, and then, in the confusion that must follow, would mount his horse and dash away in flight.

If the white man turned out to be a prisoner, he would boldly attempt his rescue.

Such was Pawnee Bill's plan, and he was prepared to act promptly and well.

It was now dark, and soon after there rode into the timber a single horseman.

Pawnee Bill could see by the light of a new moon that the man was alone, and knew that he had come as a scout, to see if any one was in the motte.

"They are awrul careful, but we'll see," he muttered, and the red-skin came straight through the timber.

He had gotten quite near when Pawnee Bill gave a low call and Guard came to his side.

"Guard, I want you to catch that pony when I kill the rider," he said.

The intelligent dog seemed to understand just what was said to him, and laying down his rifle, Pawnee Bill took his bow and fitted an arrow.

He had during a long captivity among the Indians learned to shoot a bow and arrow with wondrous skill, and he knew just what he could do.

The Indian was now not fifty feet away and still coming toward the spot where Pawnee crouched awaiting him.

He seemed to know the lay of the timber, and if he found no one in the flat on the banks of the stream, would give the call for the others to come on.

From his perfect knowledge of Indian ways, Pawnee Bill at once knew just what the red-skin meant to do.

Nearer and nearer approached the red-skin, until suddenly there was a twang, then a whiz, and Pawnee Bill's arrow buried itself half its length in the throat of the red-skin.

Without a groan, for the arrow stifled it, the red-skin fell backward and rolled off of his pony, which gave a snort of alarm and started to run.

But already Guard had darted from his retreat and had seized the Indian pony by the nostrils ere the rider had fallen from his back with Pawnee Bill's arrow in his throat.

Following up the advantage, Pawnee Bill sprung forward and seized the frightened pony and led him down into the flat.

He did not even glance then at the red-skin, seeming to know that his arrow had done deadly work.

Returning to the spot, after he had hitched the pony, Bill bent over the red-skin, dragged him to an opening where the moonlight fell upon him, and said:

"A Sioux! One from six leaves five. I'll give the call."

Raising his voice, he called out in the Sioux tongue:

"All well. Come on!"

Instantly a responsive shout came from off on the prairie, and a few moments after, the party of horsemen rode into the timber, believing that their comrade had called.

CHAPTER IX.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

As the party of red-skin horsemen, "a white man in their midst—either a renegade or prisoner—entered the timber, Pawnee Bill again gave a hail in Sioux, to have them come toward him.

But they seemed to feel that they knew best what to do, and having watered their horses at the stream, at once dismounted where they were, one of the Indians calling out to their supposed companion that they would camp there.

Pawnee Bill answered with a shout, and soon after there burst forth a bright flame over where the red-skins were.

A moment more and a fire was burning briskly, and the red-skins were visible by its glare.

Several had gone to stake the ponies out, two were busy building the fire and preparing for supper, Pawnee Bill supposed, and one stood by a tree, against which leaned the white man.

Leveling his glass, Pawnee Bill saw that the white man was bound.

Then there broke from his lips something like an oath, and the words followed:

"It is the Surgeon Scout!"

After a few minutes more, the young scout saw that the red-skins were preparing to put the prisoner to death by horrible torture, for they had bound him to a tree and were throwing wood about it.

He was to be burned to death!

Instantly the young scout decided to act, and there was no time to be lost.

The odds against him he did not count.

He saw a prisoner soon to suffer a fearful death—a man who had once cared for him when he was severely wounded in flight from the red-skins while carrying dispatches to the fort.

To the devoted care and skill of the Surgeon Scout he owed his life.

That life he would now risk to save the brave surgeon.

Back to the flat he ran, unhitched the Indian pony, and, mounting his horse, turned all three toward the group of red-skins at the further edge of the timber.

Straight toward them he rode, and when near, his approach was heard.

Instantly he gave the Sioux signal that all was right, and the Indians believed it to be their comrade coming to join them.

Then he raised his rifle and took deliberate aim at the chief.

With the crack of his rifle he gave a loud yell, and called out:

"At them, men!"

Guard uttered several fierce barks at the same moment, and as the two horses and the Indian pony rushed forward, they sounded like a large number coming to the rescue.

The second shot of Pawnee Bill was at a red-skin who was rushing on the prisoner to brain him.

The Indian's hand dropped to his side, the hand shattered by the bullet, and with wild cries the red-skins rushed toward their ponies.

Those who had taken them out to the prairie were just returning, except one who was to stand guard, and those ran back with the others.

With wild yells Pawnee Bill followed them to the edge of the timber.

Now he would give a cheer and a loud command in English.

Then he would say a few words in Pawnee, as though urging on warriors of that tribe, and next he would give his own dread war-cry.

The party of Sioux, with their chief dead, their comrade who had gone on in advance to reconnoiter also slain, and one of their braves badly wounded, ran like frightened rabbits.

They were certain that both soldiers and Pawnees were upon their track, and they threw themselves upon their ponies and started off in wild flight.

Pawnee Bill made his repeating-rifle rattle as he sent the bullets flying after them, and thus prevented them from carrying off the pony of their chief, while, as the animal of the red-skin scout had been hitched securely to the well-trained pack-horse, he was also secure.

"Well, Surgeon Powell, how are you?" called out Pawnee Bill, as he rode back to where the officer was bound to a tree.

"Pawnee Bill, my brave friend, it is you, and thanks to you I am in good health!" said the Surgeon Scout, gazing upon the youth, whom he recognized by the bright firelight.

Without reply Pawnee Bill sprung from his horse and quickly freed the Surgeon Scout from his bonds.

Then he said:

"Those reds may rally, sir, so we had better be off, for here is a pony for you, and the chief's horse is out on the prairie."

"And my arms and traps are yonder, for you gave the Indians no time to take anything with them."

"Do you mean to say that you are alone, Pawnee Bill?" and the Surgeon Scout grasped the hand of the youth.

"My horses and dog are all that I have with me, sir."

As the young scout spoke he threw the saddle

and bridle of the scout upon the Indian pony, for he saw that the rescued man was very much cramped by the bonds that had been upon him and found difficulty in moving about.

"I'll get the chief's horse, sir," and with a yell he dashed out upon the prairie, firing several more shots to encourage the Indians in their flight, should they feel inclined to halt, when they found they were not pursued.

The animal proved to be Surgeon Powell's own horse, which the chief had appropriated, and he seemed glad to get back to his old master.

Then the brave youth and surgeon hastily mounted, and with the Indian pony tied to the pack-horse, they started through the timber and thence out over the prairies, for Frank Powell said that there were other bands about, and they expected to rendezvous in the motte there to witness his being burned to death.

At a rapid pace they went over the prairie, while afar off they heard the cries of the red-skins, who were thus signaling to their other comrades to join them.

But the death of their chief, and the desperate charge of Pawnee Bill upon them, with the loss of their prisoner, had completely demoralized the party that had been in the timber, and they had no intention of following the fugitives, even if they had seen them depart from the motte.

"How'd they capture you, Surgeon Powell?" asked Pawnee Bill, as they rode rapidly along, making a wide circle to get on the trail to the fort.

"I had been on a long scout and was utterly worn out, so rode into some timber to rest."

"I did not know that there was an Indian anywhere near, and dropped into a deep sleep, from which I was awakened by finding them on top of me."

"They sprung upon me like wolves on a buffalo, and though I managed to break one's neck and choke another to death, they worsted me and soon had me tied."

"They were part of a small band on the war-path, and had made the timber where you met them the rendezvous for the two other gangs to join them, and I was to be roasted, and would have been but for your daring and timely rescue."

"Now tell me how it is that you got there in time to save me?"

Pawnee Bill told his story in his modest way, and added:

"It is best, though hard on the cattle, to push on to the fort to-night, so that a party of cavalry can start out and capture those reds."

"Yes, and I believe they can be captured if the officer in command heads them off on their retreat."

The rapid pace was kept up steadily, and an hour after midnight the tired horses saw the lights of the fort ahead and quickened their gait, while Guard gave a yelp of joy.

Soon after the fugitives had entered the stockade walls of the fort, and twenty minutes after a company of cavalry started out upon the trail of the red-skins.

The next day Pawnee Bill became more of a hero than ever with the soldiers and bordermen, when Surgeon Powell gave an enthusiastic account of his gallant rescue of him from an appalling death.

But the young scout took his honors easy, and two days after started upon his return to the lower line of forts, where he was employed as scout, guide and interpreter.

CHAPTER X.

PAWNEE BILL MAKES A VISIT.

SINCE Surgeon Frank Powell had skillfully extracted a bullet from his body and cured him of a serious wound, Pawnee Bill had held the highest esteem for him.

He had admired the handsome surgeon, had heard the stories of his romantic life and strange adventures, and made him his hero.

When he saw who it was that the Sioux had held captive, he would have attempted his rescue were their force treble what it was.

All this did Frank Powell appreciate.

He knew something of the youth's life, how he had long been the captive of Indians, and he was aware that no man on the border knew the red-skin better than did Pawnee Bill.

Then, too, he had heard much of the daring deeds of the young scout, and he admired nerve above all things.

When, therefore, he owed his escape from death to Pawnee Bill, he was more than glad to acknowledge the favor, and did so.

But Pawnee Bill was not to remain at the fort, so returned to the outpost where he was on duty, bearing with him return dispatches.

On the way back he arranged to stop at the ranch of Kent Kingdon and rest for a few hours.

The handsome face of the ranchero had quite won him, and Surgeon Powell, though he had said he did not know Kingdon, had spoken of him as a most clever man, and one who was captain of the rangers in the settlement where he dwelt.

As he approached the scene of the rescue of Kent Kingdon, the youth was surprised to see a pack of wolves take to their heels, and also to discover vultures flying up from the ground as though from a repast.

"Why, it is the body of the man I killed," he said in surprise, as he saw the torn remains of the cowboy outlaw.

His eyes then fell upon a flock of vultures upon the hilltop, and he also saw wolves there.

So thither he rode, and at once discovered the remains of the two victims of Kent Kingdon's revenge.

"How strange this is, that he did not bury that man, and why are the other two dead here?"

"Certainly the man could not have shot them in cold blood after I left."

"No, their arms are free, I see."

"I will ask him what it means."

So saying, he rode on, taking the trail which Kent Kingdon told him would lead to his ranch.

He at last came to the top of a ridge, over which the trail led, and saw before him a grandly beautiful valley.

At the foot of the hill was the ranch of Kent Kingdon, and Pawnee Bill was surprised at its being such a really comfortable home, and at the number of cattle he beheld roving about the lowlands.

As he rode down the hill he saw a horseman ride out of the stockade inclosure about the cabin and come toward him.

At once he recognized the ranchero.

"Ah! my young friend, I am glad to see you."

"And it is a coincidence, that I was just going to the scene where you saved my life," he said quickly, grasping Pawnee Bill's hand as he rode up.

"Yes, I just came from there, and—"

"You were surprised to find the dead man unburied?"

"Dead men, for the three are there?"

"I said men, for you best know, that, knowing how tender-hearted I am, those fellows begged off, and we started home together, for they were my cowboys, as I told you."

"Yes."

"Suddenly they fired upon me, and I was forced to kill both of them, for I have a bullet wound in my leg which one gave me."

"Just as I got home I heard a rumor that red-skins were about and I started in search of them, so left the bodies unburied in the haste of my departure with my rangers, so was just going to have them buried, for I have men to do so."

This, to Pawnee Bill was a satisfactory explanation of the death of the other two cowboys and the seeming heartlessness of Kent Kingdon, as the leaving of the bodies unburied had seemed to him.

Telling the youth that he would send to have the remains buried, the outlaw ranchero then turned back to the ranch, and the youth found him a most hospitable host indeed.

Although urged to do so, Pawnee Bill would not remain over night with Kent Kingdon, but after a good dinner mounted his horse and started once more on his southward trail, his pack-horse and dog following close behind.

Kent Kingdon said that he would ride some distance with him, as he was going down the valley, and he did so, leading the youth by a trail that took him far from the still unburied bodies of the three cowboys.

In fact the ranchero was most careful not to leave the youth until he had gotten him beyond the settlement of ranches, and where he was not likely to meet any one whom he could tell about the dead Trey of Hearts.

The truth was, Kent Kingdon had told his men nothing about the tragedy, and the outlaw cowboys under his command had supposed that the Trey of Hearts had been sent off on some secret service work by the chief.

"Here I will leave you, my young friend, and again I thank you for the service rendered me," said the ranchero, halting on a ridge some fifteen miles from his ranch.

"Do not speak of that, sir, for it was nothing more than I would have done for any one."

"Well, good-by, and remember if ever you pass my way, not to forget to call, for you will be always welcome."

"Thank you, sir," replied Pawnee Bill.

"You ride good horses, my friend, if these two are specimens."

"Yes, sir, I must have the best, for life often depends upon the speed of a horse."

"True; but would you part with that superb dog?"

"Oh no, sir, not for any sum would I sell him."

"I would like to have him, and if you ever care to sell him, I will give you your price for him."

"Thank you, Captain Kingdon, but that day will never come."

"Good-by, sir," and Pawnee Bill was gone, while Kent Kingdon returned slowly toward his ranch, while he hissed aloud:

"That youth is a smart one and brave as a lion."

"I must bury those bones myself, as I do not wish the cowboys to know their fate, and I was lucky to turn their ponies loose and let them join the herd, or their coming back with saddles on would have caused suspicion."

"Yes, they must be buried before that youth has reason to come this way again."

"But if he should become dangerous, he must go the way of all others who would be an obstacle in my path, for what is a human life more or less to me?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE WOUNDED RENEGADE.

THE bullet of Surgeon Frank Powell, in his duel with the renegade in the Indian village, had been well aimed.

It went straight for the heart, but was checked in its fatal mission by a wire shirt which the man wore under his jacket.

This protection, however, did not wholly stop the ball, which passed in between the meshes, splintered a rib and glancing thereon buried itself in the flesh.

The renegade fell like a dead man under the shock, and the Surgeon Scout departed, believing he had killed the man.

But the wounded outlaw soon rallied, and though believing himself mortally wounded called to the warriors about him to carry him to his tepee.

Here he had his clothing stripped off and the mail shirt also, while the chief medicine-man of the village examined his wound.

The medicine-men had certainly crude practice enough to understand wounds, and he went about dressing the one received by the renegade with the air of one who understood what was best to be done and did not care if the patient died under his treatment or not.

The result of his investigation and surgery was that the bullet was extracted, the wound dressed with herbs and the renegade left to take his chances.

Thus several days passed away, and though the medicine-men looked as wise as owls, and shook their heads when questioned by the patient about the wound, Kent Kingdon came to the conclusion that he would recover.

Studying his case he soon found out that the rib was not badly shattered, and that the bullet had touched no vital spot that would prevent his recovery.

"The steel shirt saved my life, and yet the bullet broke through it," he muttered.

"Why, that fellow is quicker with a revolver than I am, and I did not believe that could be."

"Well, I'll not die this time that is certain, and I will live for revenge."

"That Surgeon Scout must die, and I'll raid the settlements with picked braves to strike at those I hate."

"Then, too, I must get my gold, buried in that old fort-like hill, for I have a snug fortune there."

"Why, I am not so bad off as I feared, for I will recover, can strike a revengeful blow against my foes, will get considerable booty by a raid, recover my buried gold and then I can desert this Indian village and make my way to other scenes where I will enjoy life."

"I must leave these parts that is certain, for it is getting too warm for me."

"I'll run over into the California mines and become a gambler again, until I get enough to live on handsomely in civilization."

"Just to think within a year or so, I Kent Kingdon, a renegade white man and chief of red-skins, an ex-captain of outlaws, will, under an assumed name be regarded as a prince in the capitals of the old world."

"There is a future before me yet and I shall enjoy it, for I must not allow my conscience to worry me in the slightest degree."

Thus the renegade chief lay upon his bed of skins and mused about his future.

He took the days and nights that passed without fretting, and made himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

As he grew better he was generous with his gold to those who brought him game to eat, and many of the maidens of the village would tempt him with what they deemed delicacies.

Not allowing himself to worry, and seeing that he had the very best care that could be given him, in a few weeks he was again upon his feet.

He had always been a vain man, and even in his wanderings about his ranch for a day or two, he had carried with him a little dressing-case, false beards, wig and mask, so that he could thoroughly disguise himself at short notice.

Now, as he got better, he shaved his face clean, cutting off his handsome mustache, and practiced the art of painting as a warrior did.

Having considerable skill as an artist, he soon became the envy of the warriors by the skillful manner in which he made up as an Indian.

A ring of long black hair, placed over his short curls, for he had clipped them close, with his attire and painted face made him look the very picture of a red-skin.

The maidens of the village worked hunting-shirts, leggings and moccasins for him, and he made for himself a headdress of feathers, which the chief wore that was the admiration of all who saw it.

He studied hard to learn the Sioux tongue, entered into the games and sports of the tribe, practiced with bow and arrow and spear and soon felt that he was the equal of any warrior in the tribe at his own accomplishments.

The remarkable strength of the man, his dead-shot shooting, undaunted courage and powers of oratory made him feared and respected by the Indians, who came to regard him as a superior being to themselves in every way.

He showed them that he was their master, and yet he was careful not to openly excite the envy of any of the half-dozen chiefs who were his superior in rank.

Becoming the friend of the medicine-men, they were forced to admit that he could teach them something, while he had a talent for training horses and wild animals and soon had a pet panther, a bear and several wolf cubs running about his tepee, which was off to itself.

Pet owls, an eagle, hawk and small birds he had taken from their nests and trained thoroughly, and the Indians soon gave him the name of the Spirit Chief, for he kept to himself, and the power he had over the brute and bird creation amazed them.

But this was just what the renegade wished.

He was anxious to appear as a mystery to the red-skins, for he knew that it gave him greater power among them.

He had been made a chief, but there were a score who ranked him, so to speak, and he wished to have more influence than they had, and be the adviser of the great chief of the tribe.

This he soon became, though he was careful not to excite the enmity of the other chiefs in any way.

He treated them all with the greatest deference, listened to their counsels and never seemed to put himself forward.

And yet the cunning renegade knew that he was steadily gaining an influence which would force the head chief in time to be governed by him.

Thus months passed away and it became almost forgotten that he was a pale-face.

His wound had entirely healed and gave him no trouble, and he was plotting and planning for a strike at the settlements.

The Indian warriors had fretted under the restraint he had caused the chief to put upon them, and not allow them to attack the whites.

He was working for a purpose, and that purpose was treachery toward his own race.

He had said that the whites were all prepared for a bitter war, and that soldiers had increased in numbers along the frontier, so that there was but one plan to pursue, and that was for them to seek a conference with the general in command on the border, and make peace, burying the hatchet.

The Indians rebelled at this, and then the cunning renegade explained his reasons for so doing.

"We will bury the hatchet, my red brothers, and then force some of the pale-faces to attack us."

"That will be cause for us to strike back, and as the soldiers, believing all is peace, will many

of them have been sent away, we will sweep down with all our braves upon the defenseless settlements and your belts will be heavy with scalps, your village will be full of plunder, and the mountains be crowded with the cattle and horses of our foes.

"If we strike now, when the pale-faces expect war, then will we be beaten back, and you will find the soldiers burning your village and murdering your women and children.

"The white Spirit Chief has spoken to his red brothers.

"Let him hear their words."

That he had convinced them that he was right, the renegade had not the slightest doubt, and he smiled grimly as chief after chief got up in the Council Tepee and said that the Spirit Chief had spoken well.

Then he suggested that seven chiefs should be sent to the fort to sue for peace, and he added:

"And I dare be one of them."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAPTURED COURIER.

PAWNEE BILL loved adventure for the real danger he found in it.

He had his little ranch, and the Pawnees were his friends, for they regarded him as their white chief, and he felt the greatest security in having them near him, while his influence was ever good among them.

The Sioux were the foes of Pawnees and pale-faces alike, and Pawnee Bill was ever watchful to guard the settlements from the raids of that cruel tribe, and to do this made good use of the friendly Indians.

At the fort he was looked upon as a hero, and the commanding officers of the lower line of outposts made use of him as a scout, interpreter and often as an adviser, as to movements against the hostile tribes.

Then, too, he often rode as courier from outpost to outpost with important dispatches, and at such times was wont to make his way through dangers from which older men would shrink.

One day a courier came to his ranch and told him that the colonel of the fort, some thirty miles away, desired his immediate presence.

"You had better come ready for a long ride, too, Pawnee Bill, for the colonel wants you to go to the upper forts, I guess, as I know he asked for a man who would carry dispatches through the Sioux country," said the soldier.

"And would no one go?"

"Well, some of the best scouts are out now, and those that are there said the ride was too long for one horse, and they knew the Sioux were plotting deviltry by their long silence, and just laying for some one who would go into their country."

"Well, I'll ris' it," was the quiet response, and it was made in no spirit of bravado.

So Pawnee Bill got his two best horses, one to serve as a pack-animal, for he always went with two, for fear of accidents, called to his splendid dog, Guard, to follow, and rode back to the fort with the soldier.

He found, upon his arrival, that the conjecture of the cavalryman was right, the colonel wished him to go to the fort, where he had gone when he saved the life of Surgeon Frank Powell.

"Orders have just arrived, Pawnee Bill, to have a report made at once of all the soldiers and scouts at all posts along the frontier-line that guard the country of the hostile tribes, for I think there is to be a reduction in the force, as the Sioux seem not to be very troublesome of late," said the colonel.

"I don't trust them, sir."

"Nor do I; but I wish you to take the line, getting the report at each, and extending along to the last post on the upper country."

"Yes, sir."

"It will be a hard ride for you, and I need not tell you a very dangerous one, for you will have to cut across through the dangerous lands."

"The danger I must risk, sir."

"When shall I start?" was the quiet reply.

"Whenever you are ready."

"I will be ready, sir, within the hour," and Pawnee Bill rode out of the fort on his perilous mission in less than that time, while the soldiers sat upon the walls of the fort and made bets he would never make the ride in safety.

"It is good-by Pawnee Bill," was the remark of one of the sergeants, and nearly all seemed to coincide with this view, though a few who knew the grit and prairie skill of the young scout bet on his making the ride in safety.

Pawnee Bill realized fully the perils he had to encounter

He had to go along the chain of forts and outposts for a long distance, and some were very far apart.

He could, by "cutting across country," save many miles and much time between points, but this would lose him much time and the report was needed at once.

"I'll make the ride rapidly," he said to himself, and he boldly launched forth into the danger lands.

He was as skillful as an Indian in getting his bearings and reaching certain points he aimed for, and before twenty-four hours had passed he had visited three outposts.

A settlement of bold squatters was the next point visited, and here there was a fort.

Then he left the ranchero settlement, where Kent Kingdon had had his home, far to the right, and headed straight for the fort where was stationed Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout.

This was his longest and most dangerous ride, for he had to pass directly through the Sioux country, while back in the mountains were their villages.

With hunting or scouting-parties of Sioux ahead, he was fearful of running upon them at any moment, and at night he never dared light a fire, for fear of attracting them to his lonely camp.

He was in the very midst of the danger from meeting them, when one night, just at twilight, he rode into a small clump of timber to camp.

He was very tired, and knew that his horses were also.

Then Guard was worn out, and lay down panting the moment that they reached the timber.

The horses were stripped of their saddles and bridles, watered at a stream near, and after a cold supper the tired scout threw himself down upon his blankets.

The horses fed but a short while, and then lay down to sleep, and the little camp was soon in deep repose.

Under other circumstances Guard might have had his senses about him; but he was too much prostrated to be able to rouse himself.

Had the wind been blowing toward him from the West, he might have scented danger in the air.

But the wind blew from where he lay toward the point of danger.

And that danger?

Creeping like serpents in the timber came a dozen red-skins.

They had gone into the timber to camp when they beheld the young courier coming across the prairie toward it.

They at once sought a hiding-place among the ravines that the timber abounded with, and forcing their ponies to lie down in the gullies, they awaited the coming of the youth.

Had it been daylight the courier would have investigated, and had Guard crossed their track he would have scented them.

But the dim glance that Pawnee Bill had of the timber showed no danger, and he was too tired to look for a foe, and trusted to Guard to discover one while he might rest.

The red-skins were a hunting party of Sioux, but they were not adverse to taking a scalp.

They recognized the courier as Pawnee Bill, the young white chief of a tribe who were their foes.

They could afford to lie in wait and capture him.

So they waited until darkness reigned supreme, and then began to creep toward the camp.

Their ponies were already hopped to prevent their rising, and muzzled with blankets to keep them from neighing.

Thus they had only the dog and the wakefulness of the courier to dread.

Their practiced eyes told them that man, horses and dog were worn out and would naturally sleep soundly.

Nearer and nearer they approached until they were within a few feet of the sleeping youth.

They could see by the bright star-light just where he was lying. The dog was near him and the two horses not far away.

Then Guard, from an instinctive feeling of danger opened his eyes and instantly, with a loud and angry bark, sprung right at the throat of the red-skin and bore him backward to the ground. The other red-skins sprung upon Pawnee Bill, leaving their comrade to take care of the huge dog that had him by the throat.

Guard did his work well, for he broke the neck between his sharp teeth and the red-skin ceased to struggle.

A revolver-shot rang out, for though wholly taken by surprise, Bill did not lose his nerve

and his bullet went to the brain of the Indian aimed at; but, ere he could fire again he was dealt a blow on the head which felled him to the ground, and in another moment he was securely bound.

Guard had sprung upon the back of a second red-skin; but seeming to realize that his master was dead, or a prisoner, he made a quick retreat, followed by several shots and half a dozen arrows, while the second Indian that he had attacked had been left a severe remembrance of him.

CHAPTER XIII.

WITHOUT HOPE.

PAWNEE BILL recovered from the stunning effects of the blow given him, to discover that he had a wound on his head from which the blood was trickling slowly, and that, hands and feet, he was securely bound.

The Indians, with apparently no dread of a foe, had built a fire and were seated about it, discussing the affair.

The light shone full upon them, and also upon the youth, who lay back against a fallen tree near the fire.

Not far from him was the red-skin whom Guard had interviewed as number two, and his comrades had dressed his lacerated neck with herbs of some kind.

There were two dead red-skins near, one of them having fallen by Pawnee Bill's shot and the other was Guard's victim.

They were a party of hunters, and piles of game lay near, while their ponies were staked out on the prairie and one of the red-skins was on guard.

There were thirteen of them about the fire, and their faces were not cheerful looking.

They had captured the young white chief of the Pawnees, but though they had prospects of pleasure ahead in torturing him to death, they had lost two of their number and a third was in great agony from the rents in his back from the teeth of the dog.

The horses of Pawnee Bill were not far off, and he saw that the red-skins had not overhauled his traps, and his belt of arms, rifle and lance had been placed not far from him.

The Indians had at first feared that they had killed the young pale-face, and they were glad to see that his eyes were open and gazing coolly at them.

"The pale-face chief of the Pawnees is a prisoner to the Sioux," said the chief of the party.

"Tell me something I don't know, red-skin," was the reply of Pawnee Bill, in the Sioux tongue, which he spoke perfectly.

"The young chief must die."

"More stale news; but I'm not dead yet by a long way."

"No, die when sun comes."

"Oh, you intend to kill me when the sun rises?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Make pale-face Pawnee chief cry."

"You are a liar, for I would not beg you for mercy any more than I would that tree."

"Talk brave now; but when fire burn talk prayer-talk of pale-faces."

"If I pray you won't know it, you red devil."

"But where is my dog?"

The Indians misunderstood him, for they thought he said:

"There is my dog."

Dignified as they were, they sprung to their feet with yells of terror, for each thought that the huge and vicious brute was upon them.

They all wheeled to the rightabout, while Pawnee Bill burst forth into loud laughter.

"Your big scare tells me Guard is all right, so I am glad."

"I asked where he was."

The chief made no reply.

He was angry with himself for having shown fear of the dog, and he was furious with the prisoner for laughing.

His ridicule, and a red-skin hates that above all things, was also a sore thing for the others, as they had all shown great alarm.

"I know that you did not kill the dog, as you were so scared when you thought he was coming to my rescue."

"Well, do you intend to take me to your village?"

"The white chief will know," was the laconic response.

"As I do not wish to bleed to death, I wish you would look after this wound on my head."

Pawnee Bill knew that he might quietly bleed to death during the night, and thus escape torture.

But he was not one to give up hope while there was life, and so he wished his wound looked to.

The red-skins acted from no sense of mercy in dressing his wound, but from a desire to see to it that he should not die, and so be ready to be tortured to death by their devilish cruelties.

The chief therefore very skillfully dressed the wound, and Pawnee Bill lay quietly back against the log, as though to go to sleep.

But he did not sleep, for his brain was busy to see if he could not in some way effect his escape.

He found, however, that he was too securely bound, hands and feet, to free himself, and he must await the development of affairs.

The red-skins then threw themselves down in a circle about him, wrapped in their blankets, and sought sleep.

They were determined that he should have no possibility of escape.

The morning dawned at last, and Pawnee Bill felt that the fate he was to suffer was not far away.

He saw a determination among his captors to put an end to him there and not await to take him to their village.

They had come for a hunt, and did not care to take the chances of keeping him a prisoner until they could return to their people.

They just had breakfast, and gave a venison steak broiled on the coals to the captive, one of the Indians holding it while he ate it, for they would not free his hands.

He ate with apparent relish, and then watched them bury their dead companions and dress the wounds of the one whom Guard had bitten.

The sun was now rising, and they turned to the prisoner.

Pawnee Bill remained firm but was very pale.

Never in his life before had he been so near death.

Not an atom of hope seemed left for him, and there came from between his shut teeth:

"I guess I'm a goner this time."

Just as the chief, after a short talk with his braves, stepped up to the young captive, to lead him forth to torture, a warning cry came from the Indian acting as sentinel.

All started and went rapidly toward the spot where the guard stood.

"Something's up, that's certain."

"Maybe I'm not so near death after all," muttered Pawnee Bill, while there came to his heart a great hope of escape.

He watched the Indians closely and saw that they had discovered some one coming across the prairie toward the timber.

At first they seemed alarmed, and then their actions told Pawnee Bill who understood the Indian nature so well that those who were coming were the friends not the foes of the Sioux who held him captive.

"It is another of their hunting bands, I guess, and that settles me," he said in a low tone, and the hope that had come to him faded quickly away, and he was again in despair of succor.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS CHIEF.

THOSE whom the Sioux, who held captive Pawnee Bill, had seen coming across the prairie were a party of seven horsemen.

They were Indians, and more, each one of them wore the full head-dress of eagle-feathers and the toggery of great chiefs.

They were mounted upon snow-white ponies, and looked very grand and picturesque as they came riding slowly along, not in Indian file but abreast.

The hunting-party in the timber had recognized them as Sioux at a glance, and then had wondered that all were chiefs.

They knew them, and, as they advanced, came toward them.

The chiefs made a temporary halt at sight of red-skins coming out of the timber, for they might come upon a band of Pawnees they well knew.

But, recognizing their own people, they again advanced, and in a short while the young chief who had command of the hunting-party met the seven who were on the march.

"Has the chief Lone Wolf found much game?" asked the chief who seemed to be the head one of the party of seven.

"My braves have found buffalo and other game, and we have a white captive," was the reply.

"A soldier warrior from the fort?" asked the chief, while all seemed more pleased at the capture of a prisoner than at the finding of plenty of game.

"The young white chief of the Pawnees," was the triumphant response.

The chiefs at once quickened their pace, and soon rode into the timber.

There was Pawnee Bill, his hands and feet bound, his face haggard and stained with blood, but calm and defiant.

The chief who led sprung from his pony and advanced toward him, while he said in the Sioux tongue:

"You are the one the Pawnees call the Boy Chief?"

"Yes."

"I know you."

"That is more than I can say of you."

"You are a scout, guide and interpreter for the pale-faces."

"Yes; and, now I hear you talk, you are not a Sioux."

"I am White Spirit, the Sioux chief."

"Still, you are not a Sioux, for you do not speak the tongue as well as I do."

The chief seemed surprised at this, and for a moment was silent, while his comrades gazed at him as though wondering at what he would say.

"I am a Sioux chief," he said, after a while.

"That I do not doubt, but I believe you are a white man, or at least a half-breed."

Pawnee Bill saw the chief start at this, and he knew that he had struck a home-shot at him.

"It matters not who or what I am, for you are the one interested now," said the chief, speaking now in broken English.

Pawnee Bill laughed, and said:

"I hit you hard, didn't I, in seeing through your paint; but if you are a white man you are most cleverly disguised."

"My braves are preparing to kill you."

"I know that."

"They mean to torture you to death," and again the chief spoke in the Sioux tongue.

"I expect nothing else of Indians."

"You are a brave young man."

"Cowardice would not serve me now, so why not die game?"

All seemed struck with the pluck of the young courier.

"You killed two of my horses and wounded another."

"You are mistaken, for I killed but one, and my dog got away with another and chewed on yonder fellow for awhile."

"If we had not been worn out you never would have caught me."

"Where are you going?"

"To the forts."

"What for?"

"To tell the commanders a lie."

"A lie?"

"Yes, that the Sioux are at peace with the whites."

"You are a shrewd one."

"You won't be shrewd if you let your warriors kill me."

"Why?"

"Well, where soldiers are to be reduced at the forts now, others will be ordered here to increase the force at all the forts if you kill me."

The mysterious chief turned to his brother chief and walked away a few paces, all of them following him.

There they held a discussion for a few minutes and then returned to the youth, who watched them narrowly, for he knew that he had given them cause for reflection in what he had said.

"If my braves let you go will you promise not to speak of me at the fort?"

"How of you?"

"You can report having seen seven full chiefs, all mounted upon white horses, and with their lance-points all bound up with white feathers."

"I noticed this, and supposed you were going upon some peace mission, with deviltry at the back of it."

"Dont make me eat my words, Pawnee Bill, and not let you go."

"You've got me down fine."

"I know you well, and I will save you."

"If you will swear to me that you will not report holding any conversation with me, and as though you had only seen us riding toward the fort I will let you go."

"I'll do it."

"You are wounded, so can report that you were captured and escaped."

"All right."

"Will you swear not to refer to me in any way?"

"In what way could I speak of you?"

"You think I am a half-breed."

"No, I do not."

"What then?"

"I know now that you are a white man, for where has your broken English gone?"

"Ha! I trapped myself."

"You did, for you are a renegade white man among the Indians, and I hope your influence is leading them upon this errand of peace."

"It is."

"And you wish to go to the fort with your brother chiefs and not be suspected?"

"Exactly."

"Do you think, after I have been saved from a cruel death by you that I would betray you?"

"I hope not."

"I am not that kind of a fellow."

"I'd protect you instead."

"I believe you."

"And you'll let me go?"

"Yes."

"And the others?"

"Will do as I say."

"Good! And my horses and traps?"

"Take all with you."

"You are a brick; but where have we met before?"

"It does not matter where."

"We have met?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll not be curious, though I'd like to know; but if you ever get into a tight place and I can help you out, I'll do it."

"I may some day need your aid, and will keep you to your pledge."

"I'll not forget it; but now please cut the buckskin thongs for they are cutting into my arms and legs."

The mysterious chief bent over and severed the thongs and, with an effort the young courier rose to his feet.

"Well, you look Indian clean through," he said, as he gazed at the strange man before him.

Pawnee Bill saw that the braves, the chief and those who had captured him, did not like his having been set free; but then they had yielded to their leader without a word.

They only felt sorry that they had not killed and scalped their captive when they first captured him.

"Those fellows are as mad as hornets," said Pawnee Bill with a laugh.

Then he stretched himself back into shape as well as he could and soon had his horses ready for the start.

"Good-by."

"We may see you at the fort," said the mysterious chief.

"Yes."

"Don't forget your promise?"

"I won't."

"Nor your pledge to serve me should I get into trouble."

"I'll remember that, too."

Then Pawnee Bill mounted his horse and rode out of the timber, leaving the red-skins gazing after him.

The timber soon disappeared from sight, and he was riding along over the prairie at a gallop, when he heard a yelp behind him.

Turning, he gave a shout of joy, for there came Guard upon his trail, running at his top speed.

The faithful brute had been in hiding in the timber; but seeing his master depart, he had made a wide circuit and gotten upon his trail, following it rapidly.

Slipping out of his saddle, Pawnee Bill fondled the noble dog for his faithfulness, and Guard whined in excess of delight at being again with his master.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW A CHASE ENDED.

WITHOUT further adventure Pawnee Bill went on his way to the fort.

Having discovered that there were hunting-parties abroad, against whom he might again run, he shunned the hill land as much as possible, and kept clear of all timber.

He might not be so fortunate a second time, if he fell into the hands of the red-skins.

With a desire to avoid all danger possible, after his severe lesson, he camped at night on the open prairie, building no fire, and so passed the few hours of the night, while Guard, seemingly learning from experience also, was careful to sleep with one eye open.

The next day Pawnee Bill resumed his way, and early in the afternoon was riding slowly along when he suddenly beheld a party of horsemen appear over the rise of the prairie not very far from him.

It did not take him very long to see that they were Sioux and he started off in flight, though at a canter.

He was sure that the red-skins were another hunting party, and knew that they would take more pleasure in hunting human game, himself for instance, than in killing buffalo and deer.

There were a score of Indian horsemen, and their eyes fell upon him just as he beheld them.

Instantly they started in pursuit, and a moment after the chase was begun in deadly earnest.

The two horses of Pawnee Bill were splendid animals, running swiftly and with great endurance.

Then the pack-horse kept by the side of his master, though not led, and so Pawnee Bill had no trouble with him.

The dog was as fleet as a deer and ran alongside of the horses, or before them at will, and the young courier knew that he could keep up the pace for miles.

His horses he was well aware were tired, after their long trip, but he had no fear of the Indian ponies in chase overtaking him, and so kept on at a sweeping gait.

The Indians, however, were well mounted, and they must have been resting, for their ponies came along as though perfectly fresh.

Did they capture him Pawnee Bill knew that they would not believe his story that their chief, the White Spirit, had allowed him to go free.

No, they loved a scalp too well for that, and especially his scalp.

After a run of a mile or two the youth began to see that the pace was beginning to tell upon his horses.

The trail they had followed so long had fatigued them greatly, and they were not in condition to urge in so hard a race, against animals that were fresh comparatively.

But capture meant death, and horseflesh must suffer where human life was at stake.

There were about half of the Indian ponies gaining upon the two horses, and the distance between the leading warrior and Pawnee Bill had dwindled down to about two hundred yards.

The scout had his repeating rifle ready for action, and made up his mind to throw no shot away.

He saw ahead of him a stream, and the separate trails led toward a crossing where there was scattered timber.

The banks were steep, but cut away at the ford, and Pawnee Bill decided to make a stand there for a short while to rest his horses and Guard, who was also growing leg-weary.

The Indians seemed to feel that the youth would do this and so pressed their horses the harder.

Did he stop there they knew that some of them would fall.

They had recognized the young white chief of the Pawnees, their bitter foes, and were most anxious to carry back his scalp, while his horses and weapons would be quite a prize for them.

As Pawnee Bill approached the ford he slackened his pace, intending to halt under shelter of the bank and fire from there upon the Indians as they approached.

"I guess I can stand them off until dark, once I open with my repeating rifle," he said as the stream was now but a short distance from him.

Just as he was about to draw rein he heard a voice call out:

"Keep straight on across the ford, and I'll check them!"

The speaker was beyond the bank, and under its shelter, and Bill uttered a cry of pleasure as he saw before him, crouching, rifle in hand, none other than the Surgeon Scout!

The youth wished to halt, too; but the Surgeon Scout said sternly:

"You must keep on, but go at a slow pace, cross the stream and I will follow as soon as I have given them a set-back."

The young scout obeyed, dashed into the water and passed on across the stream.

Being out of sight of the Indians he was soon on the other shore, to their surprise, for they had evidently expected him to halt and stand at bay, and they uttered yells of delight as they saw that there was an unbroken prairie beyond for miles, and surely there they could overtake him.

Nearer and nearer they drew to the banks of the stream until but a hundred yards intervened, and then there came a puff of smoke and a rifle-shot, followed quickly by several others.

Pawnee Bill had halted on the other shore to see the Surgeon Scout get in his wonderful work. He saw one Indian drop from his pony,

and then two mustangs go down at the cracks of the rifle.

He saw that the red skins were completely surprised and had turned in flight at once, to get beyond range.

The rapid shots evidently had caused them to believe that there was more than one man behind the bank.

They saw Pawnee Bill resting upon the other shore, and they were wild with rage for having been led by him into a trap.

They had quickly fled out of range, followed by several other shots, to encourage them in their flight, and they had come to a halt to await the coming up of the laggards and also to decide upon what was best to be done.

The whole line soon came up, the score of warriors reduced one in number and with two mustangs dead.

A short consultation was held, while the Surgeon Scout reloaded his repeating-rifle with cartridges, and calmly awaited further developments.

They soon decided that they would charge in force, and in a body they rushed on, one Indian who had no pony riding behind a comrade.

On they swept, and yet no one came from beyond the bank.

The Surgeon Scout seemed to divine their intention, and knew that it was not Indian nature to charge upon an unseen foe without knowing what force was in ambush.

"This is a feint, and they wish to carry off their dead comrade. I will give them more work to do in that line," muttered Surgeon Powell, as the Indians rushed on, straight for the body of their dead companion, and were sweeping around him, when the rifle of the Surgeon Scout rang out rapidly, while his wild, ringing war-cry told them who was their foe.

He certainly kept his word, about giving the red-skins more work to do in bearing off dead, for another brave fell mortally wounded, while another was so badly crippled that he had to be carried off the field.

But they would not retreat without their dead, and both the slain and wounded men taken back to a safe distance.

When they again turned their eyes toward the stream they beheld the Surgeon Scout ride up from the ford and appear upon the further bank, from whence he and Pawnee Bill rode off together at a slow pace.

The reds were quite willing to let them go without further molestation, and at sunset the two comrades rode into the fort together.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE CHIEFS.

THE moment that the two scouts saw that the Indians would not venture across the stream, they went along at a slow pace, and Pawnee Bill said:

"Surgeon Powell, I am largely in your debt."

"Don't mention it, for you would have beaten them back had I not been there, for I saw that it was your intention to halt and so stand at bay."

"Yes, I wished my horses and dog to get as long a rest as possible; but I do not believe I could have checked their charge, in fact know that I could not."

"They had no idea how many were behind the bank, and were amazed to see me go on and some one else take up my quarrel."

"Indeed, sir, I owe you my life."

"Well, we will be quits some day, maybe; but you are bound for the fort?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where from?"

"The lower forts, sir, and I bear dispatches for your colonel."

"When did you leave?"

"This is my fourth day out, sir, and I have gone by the different outposts; but I saw a band of seven chiefs, in full toggery and mounted on white horses, coming toward the fort."

"Indeed! This means a peace mission."

"Yes, sir; they are evidently bound on a visit to the fort for a 'peace talk,' and should arrive there to-morrow."

"Where were they when you saw them?"

"In the Red Oak Motte."

"I know the place; and they came from the mountains?"

"They were on that trail, Surgeon Powell; but I fell in with a party and got worsted, though I made my escape."

"They left me this little souvenir, and they will not forget either myself or guard."

And Pawnee Bill showed the wound on his head and his still swollen wrists, which the thongs had cut.

"You were lucky to escape, Pawnee Bill; but

these chiefs you speak of must be coming on an errand of peace with tomahawk in hand, as their braves have twice attacked you."

"Those were roving bands, sir, and did not know of this mission of peace, I guess."

"Well, the Sioux have been very good of late, and I hope will continue so; but I am always suspicious when red-skins hanker after peace without having been given some severe lesson."

"Are the road-agents giving you much trouble now in these parts, Surgeon Powell?"

"No, for some time ago we entrapped the Toll-takers band in an ambush which they had prepared for an army-train, and fairly wiped them out."

"The colonel had some of them shot, and their leader, a pretended ranchero from the valley settlements, escaped and ran to the Indians for protection."

"Indeed! And turned renegade?" asked Pawnee Bill, remembering the mysterious white chief he had met.

"He meant to do so; but, having once saved the life of the head chief, I ventured to trail him there and shot him."

"You are a bold man, Surgeon Powell, for I never heard of a more reckless act."

"No, the red-skins would not harm me where their chief was, I felt sure, though if they caught me elsewhere they would be glad to take my scalp."

"I was glad to rid the country of such a man, as he was a human fiend."

Thus the two friends rode on together to the fort, and the colonel warmly greeted Pawnee Bill and heard the story of his perilous and long ride.

But the young scout did not tell of his meeting with the seven Sioux chiefs, and of his rescue from them, other than to say that he had seen them upon the trail and felt sure that they were coming to the fort on a peace mission, from their appearance, on white horses, and with their snowy head-dresses and feather-muffled lance-heads.

"I hope their mission is one of peace, and I shall be glad to meet them half-way," said the colonel, and he at Surgeon Powell's request turned Pawnee Bill over to him as his guest, during the few days that he would remain in the fort before starting upon his return to his own post of duty.

The next day the sentinel on the watch-tower of the fort reported a party of horsemen in sight.

As they drew nearer they were seen to be seven in number, and they rode white horses.

"They are coming as you said, Pawnee Bill," the colonel remarked, and then he added:

"Powell, as you speak their lingo, and must know some of them, ride out and meet them."

The Surgeon Scout mounted a white horse, in token that he met the chiefs half way in their peaceful errand and rode forward.

But he was very careful to go armed, in case there should be the slightest attempt at treachery.

As he drew near they halted in a row and lowered the points of their long lances, which, as has been said, were covered with white feathers.

When near enough to see the seven chiefs, the Surgeon Scout noted their faces closely.

During his stay in the Sioux village, when he had cared for the head chief, he had seen many of the great men of the tribe.

Now he recognized several whom he had then seen, while others were unknown to him.

The mysterious chief did not push himself forward, and allowed one of the others to be spokesman.

"What do my red brothers, the great chiefs of the Sioux wish in coming to the gun-houses of the pale-faces?" said Surgeon Powell, referring to the fort as the red-skins called it as gun-houses.

"The Sioux are a great people, and the mighty chief Thunder has sent us to seek the white chief and ask that the tomahawk may be buried, the scalping-knife be allowed to rust, and no longer be stained with the blood of the pale-faces," said one of the chiefs.

"And my red brothers are here on an errand of peace?"

"The mighty medicine-man speaks with a straight tongue."

"Let my red brothers come with me to see the white chief."

They followed him in silence as he rode back to the fort.

The Sioux were anxious, there was no doubt of that, for they knew how treacherous they were in their hearts; but they kept up an appearance of calmness, even when they saw large

numbers of soldiers crowding around them to look at them, and the looks of some were menacing.

The Surgeon Scout led the party toward the headquarters of the colonel-commanding, and standing near the officer, talking with him, was Pawnee Bill.

He recognized the mysterious chief at a glance, and the latter saw that the youth had kept his word, and not betrayed him as being a renegade among the Sioux.

The colonel greeted the visitors cordially, ordered soldiers to take their horses, and gave them food.

"If the Surgeon Scout's keen vision does not detect that the White Spirit has blue eyes, no one else, I am sure, will ever detect that he is a pale-face and a renegade, for he is disguised wonderfully," mused Pawnee Bill to himself as he stood watching the chief.

The chiefs seemed well pleased with their reception, and their keen eyes were busy watching all that took place, and seeming to count the number of soldiers in the fort, take in the strength of the works and stockade, and in fact post themselves thoroughly upon all that would be useful for future reference in an attack.

One of chiefs, by name Red Bird, did the talking, while the White Spirit did not open his lips.

He knew that Surgeon Powell spoke the Sioux tongue perfectly, and he had no desire to betray himself by his own imperfect knowledge of the language, as he was not yet perfectly at home in speaking it.

He rather hung back out of sight, shielding himself as much as possible from the view of the Surgeon Scout and the other officers, by keeping in the center of the group.

The Red Bird made a good speech, in his Indian way, and it was interpreted by Surgeon Powell.

He said that the Sioux wished to bury the tomahawk, and become the friends of the pale-faces.

His young men, as matters then stood, had to fight their foes even when on a hunt for food for their women and children.

If there was peace, then his braves could hunt freely over the prairies and through the mountains, while his people would not have to be constantly sorrowing for their dead warriors, slain in battle.

In conclusion Red Bird said that they came from the big chief of their tribe, Thunder, to ask for peace.

CHAPTER XVII.

UNDER SUSPICION.

The colonel listened attentively to every word of Red Bird's, and pondered over what was said.

Now and then he asked Surgeon Powell to ask certain questions, and then he said that peace was what the pale-faces wished, and that the Sioux were right in deciding to bury the tomahawk, as in the end their destruction was certain.

If the chiefs would return to their people, call in their warriors who might be upon the war-path, their scouts and hunting-parties, and tell all of them that the war was at an end, that there was to be no more killing of soldiers from an ambush, no more raiding of settlements, burning the homes of the whites and murdering women and children, he, the colonel, would be glad to agree to such a state of affairs.

He would keep his soldiers off the war-path, and if any of them, unless in self-defense, killed a Sioux, then he would be punished by death.

If, after a month's time, when all the Sioux not in camp could be posted as to how matters stood, and all the settlements and forts told of the peace between the whites and Indians, the red-skins raided a settlement or killed a white man or woman, then he would march against the villages of the Indians and destroy them.

The Pawnees, who were then friendly to the pale-faces, must also be included in the peace, for the colonel would have no war between the different tribes.

With these words, which Surgeon Powell interpreted, the colonel ceased speaking.

"Now let us hear what my other red-brothers have to say," said the surgeon.

The Red Bird said that he spoke for all.

But Frank Powell responded:

"It is but customary for all to talk.

"If your big chief were here then his words would be supreme; but the white chief wishes to hear the words of all."

Red Bird looked at the renegade and his fellow Indians.

He was in a quandary what to do, for the White Spirit had particularly expressed the wish to his fellow chiefs that he did not wish to say anything, for fear of betraying himself.

So, after this silent signaling with the eyes between each other, the Red Bird said:

"My brothers speak as I do."

"Let me hear their words, for no man can speak from the heart of another," persisted Frank Powell.

Pawnee Bill felt that the surgeon had some motive in saying this.

"His suspicions are aroused, for, though he hardly glances at the White Spirit, I think that he has noticed his blue eyes," mused Pawnee Bill.

The colonel also seemed to realize that Surgeon Powell had some motive for hearing the others express themselves, so he said:

"Say to the chief, Surgeon Powell, that I wish to hear the words of each of them."

Frank Powell interpreted this, and the chiefs looked at each other as though in a quandary.

"Colonel, will you allow Pawnee Bill here to act as interpreter, as I desire to look after a certain patient who I think demands my immediate attention?"

There was a look in the face of the surgeon which the colonel seemed to read covertly, for he said:

"Certainly, Powell, for Pawnee Bill speaks the Indian languages, I have heard, as well as a red-skin."

"Thank you, sir, for excusing me," and Frank Powell saluted his commander and then said:

"Pawnee Bill, kindly take my place as interpreter."

The young scout saw that the surgeon was scheming, but this the red-skins failed to observe, and they saw him walk away around the headquarters cabin with apparent relief.

The moment that he had gone the White Spirit spoke up with:

"If the great white chief would hear the words of my heart and that which my brothers would say, we are ready to talk."

The group was seated in a semicircle in front of the large cabin which was used as the fort headquarters, and the colonel sat facing them, while several officers, some dozen or more, were grouped near their commander.

The day was delightful, and the windows and doors of the large cabin were open, and every one within could hear all that passed.

In speaking as he did White Spirit used his best Sioux, and to one who spoke the language but fairly well, it would have passed muster as good Indian.

But to one who knew the Sioux tongue as did Surgeon Powell and Pawnee Bill, it could have been detected that the white chief was not of that tribe at least.

The moment that Powell had departed the White Spirit had made his remark, and then the others expressed a willingness to talk also, but the renegade was anxious to have his say before the return of the man whom he feared.

Pawnee Bill saw at his first words that Surgeon Powell would have detected the fraud.

But he interpreted his words to the colonel, and then at the latter's request bade the renegade say what he wished.

This the White Spirit did, speaking slowly and in a low tone.

He made about the same remarks that Red Bird had, and yet did not speak but a few minutes.

Pawnee Bill interpreted all that he said to the colonel, and then followed the other five, and these were more long-winded, for they had not the motive in keeping silent that the renegade had.

Then too an Indian considers himself an orator, and like many a politician and preacher, loves to hear himself talk and does not know when to stop.

When the last one had ceased speaking and the colonel arose to say that the peace was to be made, Surgeon Powell suddenly stepped out of the cabin door, to the surprise of all, for no one had believed him to be in there, supposing that he was away in the hospital.

Even Pawnee Bill was surprised, for he had come to the conclusion that he had been wrong in believing that the Surgeon Scout suspected double-dealing among the chiefs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRAITOR.

The sudden, and certainly unexpected appearance of the Surgeon Scout, was, as I have said, a surprise to all.

He stepped out of the cabin, his face as usual, unmoved, and said:

"Colonel, may I question these chiefs?"

The colonel knew well that Powell had not gone to the hospital, but had been eavesdropping in the cabin, having entered from the rear door.

This he felt assured of, as he did that he had done so with some deep purpose in view.

And Pawnee Bill was now certain that the keen eyes of the army doctor had penetrated the paint of the renegade.

"Certainly, Surgeon Powell; but how about your patient?" asked the colonel with a smile at the device of the surgeon.

"The patient I referred to is here, sir, and I will prescribe for him now," and turning to the Indians he began to question them each one, regarding their intentions to keep the pledge of peace when made.

Upon his return, in spite of their stoicism they all started.

They were in hopes they had gotten rid of him, and that Pawnee Bill was to interpret for them up to the time of their departure, which they were with one accord determined should be soon.

As for the renegade he was calm, though he could not still the violent beating of his heart.

He was sorry that he had ventured into the lion's den.

The others could have come without him; but then he was anxious to prove to his comrades how brave he was, and, with treachery in his heart to his own race, he was determined to find out just

what he could regarding the strength of the fort and force stationed there at that time.

Being a white man, he could understand all that was said in English, and thus be well posted.

Under these considerations he had boldly risked his life when he had ventured into the fort disguised as an Indian.

The coming back then of the Surgeon Scout naturally made him feel anxious, and he awaited the result with intense suspense.

With no look at the renegade, the Surgeon Scout began his questioning with the Red Bird.

Pawnee Bill interpreted rapidly the replies, and after having satisfied himself that Red Bird was all right, the Surgeon Scout turned to another chief.

And so he went through the group, reserving the White Spirit for the last.

In addressing the renegade the Surgeon Scout spoke with remarkable rapidity, as though to bewilder the man.

The replies were deliberately given, and yet the renegade was compelled to ask the questions to be repeated two and three times.

Turning now and then to the other chiefs, the Surgeon Scout would speak just as rapidly, but the answers would be returned just as quickly, showing to all that the White Spirit was either hard of hearing, or did not know his own tongue so as to speak it readily.

At last the Surgeon Scout stepped close up to the renegade.

The man had stood the ordeal well.

He was perfectly calm, and met with unflinching eyes those of the Surgeon Scout.

"Colonel, let me ask you if you have observed how little like his comrades this man speaks the Sioux tongue?"

"I have, Powell, and supposed that he must be from some other tribe."

"He is, sir, and a peculiar Indian tribe it must be, colonel, for do you not observe that he has blue eyes?"

A murmur ran around the crowd of officers, and all eyes were turned upon the renegade chief, while Pawnee Bill muttered to himself:

"I expected it; he was a fool to come here."

That the supposed Sioux chief had blue eyes all now saw.

They did not kindle however, and the renegade bore the ordeal bravely.

He appeared not to understand what had been said and looked as unconcerned as did the other chiefs.

"What does it mean, Surgeon Powell?" asked the colonel.

"It means, sir, that this is a white man in disguise, a renegade, and if I did not know that I had killed Kent Kingdon I would swear that this is he, for few men had such eyes as he had," said Surgeon Frank Powell impressively.

"We must know just who and what he is, Powell, for if he is a renegade white man, this visit has been gotten up for treacherous motives, rather than peace," said the colonel sternly.

"I will half strip him sir, and see if he does not show a white skin," decided Powell stepping forward.

The chiefs saw that there was trouble, but they could not understand just what.

Then the White Spirit stepped forward and said:

"There is no reason, sir, to heap indignities upon me, for I confess to being a white man."

"Ah! a renegade?" said the colonel with a sneer, while Powell smiled.

"In one sense of the word a renegade, yes, for I dwell among red-skins who have been at war with my own race; but, I was captured by the Sioux, my life was spared and I became one of their chiefs by casting my lot with them.

"I have no ties to bind me, and I have had much of sorrow in my life, so was glad to escape from among my kind and seek a home among the red-skins.

"That I have done good this very visit proves, for my pleadings urged the Indians to bury the tomahawk, and this mission of peace was gotten up through my influence.

"I came disguised as I am; knowing that if believed to be a renegade I would be misunderstood, and as a pretended Indian I could use more influence, and have you understand the motives better."

"Now, sir, I am of course at your mercy and in your hands."

The renegade had spoken in an earnest manner that at once seemed to carry conviction with his words.

The colonel, as well as the other officers, were surprised with what he said, as well as his manner, and the former said:

"Without entering into the question as to the cause of your hiding from your people among the red-skins, who are at war with your race, I will say that you seem to have acted for the best at least."

"One moment, colonel."

"Well, Powell?"

"Let us see just who this man is."

"How can we know unless he wishes to tell us?"

"The more I look at him, sir, the more I think he is one whom I believed dead. That one has seemed to have as many lives as a cat, for he always comes to life again, and though I was sure I had killed him, I now believe this man to be Kent Kingdon."

"Kent Kingdon!"

The name broke from the lips of the colonel in amazement.

Then came in a chorus from the officers:

"Kent Kingdon!"

"Yes, the man who was known as the Card King."

"Do you really believe this man to be he to whom you refer?"

"I do, sir, and I can prove my words, and will do so, unless he desires to confess to his identity."

"There is no need of you to take the trouble to prove what you certainly can, so I confess," said the renegade.

"You are Kent Kingdon?"

"Yes."

"The Card King?"

"So called."

"The Gambler King?"

"The same."

"But I thought I had killed you?"

"You nearly did so."

"But you got well?"

"As you see, for your bullet glanced on my rib, just over the heart."

"This time there will be no escape for you, Kent Kingdon."

"Ho! guard, seize that man!" and the voice of Frank Powell rang out like a trumpet as he gave the order.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOOMED.

The colonel and the officers about him were greatly surprised at this sudden turn in the affair, while the Indians were in dire alarm.

They expected that they would at once be massacred, and they stood ready to defend their lives and die game.

But Surgeon Powell at once quieted their fears ere they could do aught which would cause them to be put to death.

"Hold, Sioux chiefs!"

"Your lives are safe; but it is this man whom we hold guilty of crime, and his life shall be the forfeit."

Then turning to the colonel, he held a conversation with him for quite a while, and Pawnee Bill and two of the officers were also in the council.

In the mean time the renegade had been seized and disarmed, ere he could do as he made an effort to do, that is kill the Surgeon Scout.

He stood silently regarding the scene, with a look of utter indifference upon his face.

If he must die, he would not show dread of his fate.

After consulting together for awhile, the colonel said:

"I leave the matter in your hands, Powell."

At this the surgeon turned to the guard and said:

"Put that man in the guard-house, and place over him a double guard."

The sergeant saluted, and the renegade was being led away, when he called out:

"To you, sir, I appeal for a favor."

It was to the colonel that he spoke.

"Well, sir?" answered the commandant, sternly.

"I know that I have already been tried and sentenced to death, and I have certain affairs I wish to have in a good shape, so would ask if I could have one to arrange matters for me, one in whom I have confidence!"

"I will send any one of my officers to you, sir."

The renegade looked over the party, and then said:

"That young man knows the lower country, I believe, and I have affairs there unsettled."

"May he be the one?"

He referred to Pawnee Bill.

"That young man is not under my command, sir; but if he will serve you as you desire, he has my permission to do so."

"I will do so, sir," announced Pawnee Bill, who saw an appealing look in the eyes of the renegade for him to do so.

"Thank you."

"Come to me at any time you please," and the renegade marched off with his guard.

Then Surgeon Powell turned to the six chiefs and said, addressing them in Sioux:

"Though I have no doubt but that that wicked white chief came here for mischief, and not on an errand of peace, you may have been his dupes, and so I will, as the great white chief permits it, allow you to go.

"What has passed in the way of peace proposals, will remain, so beware not to prove treacherous, or bitterly will you regret it."

The chiefs seemed to be glad of their escape, and, again professing that peace was the object of their coming, took their departure, leaving the White Spirit in the hands of his foes.

The Indians rode off in a very subdued manner, whatever was in their thoughts and soon disappeared from sight over the prairie.

"Colonel, I would like to take the trail of those chiefs and see just what they are about, for they may have bands of braves awaiting them."

"You can go, Powell; but what about this renegade?"

"You know his record, sir, and that he deserves death a dozen times over, so why not have a squad shoot 'im at sunset?"

"This is rather sudden; but then the man is already condemned and sentenced, and it will be best to have it over."

"I will have Lieutenant Delorme act as officer of the execution and the man shall die," sternly said the colonel.

Soon after Surgeon Powell mounted his horse and rode away on the trail of the Sioux chiefs, for he could not get the idea out of his head that all was not right and that, as Kent Kingdon had been their leader, treachery was at the bottom of the visit of the red-skins to the fort on a pretended mission of peace.

In the mean time the lieutenant who had been placed in charge of the execution of the renegade,

detailed his men, went out to the timber half a mile away from the fort, where was the burying-ground of the soldiers, had the grave of the doomed man dug and all preparations made for the hour of sunset.

It was the intention of the colonel to have no display made over the matter.

The man had already been condemned to death on a number of counts, to be shot wherever found, and the colonel was determined there should be no mistake this time.

Late in the afternoon Pawnee Bill went to headquarters and asked permission to visit the doomed man, as he had been asked to do, and the colonel readily gave the permit for him to be admitted to the guard-house and be allowed to see the prisoner alone.

"I sent him word by Lieutenant Delorme, that he was to die at sunset, so if you can get any information out of him about the real intentions of the Sioux, pray do so, Pawnee Bill," the colonel had said as the youth turned away to go to the guard-house.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SENTENCE.

The renegade sat in the guard-house brooding over his past life.

He felt that there would be no mercy shown him, and this was proven when Lieutenant Delorme entered the log cabin which was in one corner of the stockade.

There were no other prisoners confined there just then, and a guard was walking to and fro in front of the door, while another was seated under a tree near by.

"Prisoner, I come with a message to you from the commandant," said Lieutenant Delorme, as he entered.

"It is to tell me I must die, I suppose?" was the cool response.

"You have guessed it."

"I knew it."

"The hour is at sunset to day."

"So soon?" was the calm query.

"Yes; it is better to have it over with, better for all concerned, as it must be."

"True; but I would like to see that young scout ere I die."

"He will come here during the afternoon."

"I am glad of that; but am I to be hanged?"

"No, you are to be shot to death."

The prisoner's face brightened at this, but he made no reply.

"I suppose you would like to change your garb for a civilized dress and get this paint off of you?"

"No."

"You do not wish to die as an Indian?"

"Why not?"

"You are a white man."

"I was; but I am a renegade now, and have allied myself with the red-skins, so will die as one."

"Come, tell me why you came here to the fort."

"Have the chiefs gone?"

"Yes."

"You allowed them to go?"

"Yes, the colonel did, for Surgeon Powell deemed it best."

"That man has a great deal of influence here."

"Surgeon Powell?"

"Yes."

"He deserves it, for he is a splendid surgeon, and a fine officer, while he has few equals among bordermen as a scout and Indian-fighter."

"He is a remarkable man I admit."

"He is, indeed, for he is surgeon, scout, guide and officer here; but about your coming to the fort?"

"How long have the chiefs been gone?"

"Some hours."

"Well, I came here to look about me and learn just what I could about the forts and the forces along the line, with the new settlements, expected trains, and in fact all the information I could glean of value, so that I could strike a fearful blow."

"Villain! you dare confess this?" cried the lieutenant with angry manner.

"You asked me."

"Then I will have you executed without a regret, I assure you."

"At sunset you die, remember."

"Is it to be a grand occasion?"

"No, you are to be marched to the burying-ground and stand by your open grave, which I have dug."

"A squad of but four men are to shoot, and they are to stand within ten feet of you."

"Then you are to be buried and you will have paid the penalty of your crimes."

"We all have but one time to die," was the cool response.

"True; but it is well that most men have a desire to die an honorable death."

"It matters not to me."

"Well, I will leave you now, but half an hour before sunset I will come for you."

"In the mean time can I send you the chaplain of the fort?"

"What for?"

"To pray with you."

"No, I care not for his prayers."

"He may help you."

"Bah! it is too late for a man to pray when death has its grip on him."

"I'll send him."

"Do not, for I shall not see him, and I think it wrong to persecute a dying man."

"As you please."

"I please not to see him."

"Well, make your peace with your Maker as best you can."

"I pity you, and yet you hardly deserve pity."

"I will be on hand at the hour named, and remember there is no hope for you."

"I neither ask for mercy or expect it."

"But do not let that scout fail to come here to see me."

"I will tell him," and so saying the lieutenant left the guard-house.

"Has he given you any trouble, Scott?" he asked the guard.

"None, sir, for he has not spoken to me."

"He is to be shot at sunset; but there is no chance for him to escape, as he will be shot in the irons he now has on him."

So saying the young lieutenant passed on to the quarters of the officers and looked up Pawnee Bill.

"I have just left the guard-house, Lillie, and the prisoner is anxious to see you," he said to Gordon Lillie when he met him.

"I will go there soon to see him, sir."

"He is to be shot at sunset, you know."

"So soon? then I will lose no time, for he seems to have something important to make known from what he said," and soon after Pawnee Bill wended his way to see the doomed renegade.

CHAPTER XXI.

PAWNEE BILL'S PROMISE.

WHEN Pawnee Bill showed his permit to the guard, the latter at once admitted him to the presence of the prisoner.

"Guard, will you kindly go out of ear shot, for what I have to say to this young man are words from one who is, I may say, dying, and they concern only myself."

"I'll give you all the quiet you wish, for I'm not one to refuse a request to a doomed man."

And the kind-hearted guard walked off some paces from his beat, just in front of the door of the log prison.

"Sit down, my young friend," said the renegade, and Pawnee Bill took a seat upon a bench near the prisoner.

"Well, it seems my end is near."

"Yes, and you were wrong to come here."

"I suppose the Surgeon Scout has filled you full of stories about my crimes?"

"No; he has said nothing about you, other than that you deserved hanging."

"Ah! that is according to his views."

And the face of the man seemed to light up with pleasure.

"The Surgeon Scout has gone on the trail of the six chiefs to see what mischief they are up to."

"He will find that they will return at once to their village, for, without me as their leader, they will not carry out their plans."

"And those plans?"

"Were peace, of course; for, though the Surgeon Scout thinks me a bad man, I was, on the contrary, doing all in my power to keep off a war between the red-skins and the whites."

"Circumstances of a bitter nature made me what I am, and so I now find myself condemned to die."

"But is there no hope for me, Pawnee Bill?"

"Not an atom."

"You are sure?"

"It seems so utterly impossible for me to do so."
"Not as I have planned."
"Suppose I can get no chance to draw the bullets from the rifles?"

"Then I must take my chances."
"The chances are that I cannot."
"Mind you, I know how hard it will be; but my death is certain without your aid, and the chances against me even with your assistance are very great; but I must expect that, and, like the drowning man, catch at a straw."

"And should you escape?"
"Why?"
"If it is your intention to return to the Sioux and begin again the life which the Surgeon Scout says you have led, I would not do aught to save you."

"The Surgeon Scout makes charges which he cannot prove."

"I went among the Indians from a desire to avoid my own race."

"I was, as you know, a ranchero, and they accused me of outlawry."

"I was so charged by my own cowboys, and I could not prove my innocence, so I fled."

"Since I have lived among the red-skins it must be admitted that they have not been as bad as they were."

"They certainly have not of late," admitted Pawnee Bill.

The truth was the man did not seem to him to be as guilty as it was said he was.

He thought that the Surgeon Scout might be mistaken, and, owing his own life to him as he did, he wished to serve him.

Still, if he thought that the man would go back to the Sioux and seek, through them revenge upon the Surgeon Scout and his own race, he would not raise a hand to save him.

So he said:

"If I try to save you, will you pledge yourself to do all in your power to keep the Sioux from making war upon the whites?"

"I do so pledge myself and it is my desire to return to them, and, when a peace is made through me, to let Surgeon Powell know that it was through me, and that I escape death; but who aided me I will not tell him, nor will I allow him to believe that you were my friend. For I can state that I had those here who helped me, while a steel shirt I wore prevented the bullets from penetrating."

"Do you wear such a shirt?"
"Candidly I do; but I have known bullets to penetrate it, and I do not wish to rely wholly upon it, so ask you to draw the lead bullets from the rifles and place these in their place."

"Well, upon your pledge never to raise hand against your own race, and to do all you can to make the red-skins enter upon a lasting peace with the whites, I will help you as much as lies in my power."

"I thank you, and I make the pledge," the prisoner said earnestly.

"And now about the last arrangements you wished to make, in case I cannot save you."

"I have no arrangements to make, other than to give you a slip of paper the minute before the officer orders his squad to fire."

"If I should die, read the paper and it will tell you what to do."

"If you should save me, why give me back the paper unread."

"I will."

"And, by the way, I will present you my horse, and outfit."

"I do not care for anything."

"When do you start on your way back to the lower country?"

"To-morrow."

"Why not go to-night?"

"Why?"

"Well, I'll send word by the guard to the colonel that I wish you to have my horse and outfit, and you can start to-night."

"Suppose you go all ready to keep on from the grave, and take my horse with you, and if I come through the ordeal all right, I can go on my way, while you keep on yours."

Pawnee Bill was silent for a few minutes and then said:

"I will save you if I can, for I owe my escape from being tortured to death to you."

Without another word he arose and left the renegade alone with his own bitter conscience.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE EXECUTION.

WHEN Pawnee Bill left the guard-house he made his way to the quarters of Lieutenant Delorme.

That officer was just going out, but bade the young scout sit down and await his return, as he would not be long away.

"Luck seems to aid me," muttered Pawnee Bill, and he looked around for the four rifles which the prisoner had said the officer had taken to his quarters to personally load for the execution, as two of the weapons only were to have bullets in them, that the men might not know who it was fired the fatal shot.

The four rifles stood in the corner, and quickly did Pawnee Bill set about discovering which were the two that were loaded.

He hit the right ones at once, and, quickly taking out the cartridges, replaced the real bullets with the bogus ones, and then taking up a book sat down to read and await the return of the officer.

"I was longer away than I expected, Pawnee Bill, so pardon me."

"I have been entertaining myself, sir; but I called to see you about the prisoner."

"Well?"

"He wishes me to go to the scene of execution with him."

"You have my permission, certainly."

"Where will it be?"

"In the soldiers' burying-ground, something less than a mile from the fort."

"That is just off from my trail southward."

"Yes, sir, the timber to the right."

"Then I will start to-night and stop with you, sir, until after the execution."

"As you please, for the colonel has your dispatches ready, he just informed me."

"And the prisoner has given me his horse and outfit."

"Made you his heir, oh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, no one will begrudge you your little fortune, I am sure, Lillie, though the animal is a fine one and the weapons of the man are splendid ones."

"I will start half an hour before sunset, so come by for me."

"Yes, sir," and Pawnee Bill went to get his horses ready and acquaint the colonel with the fact that he would start that evening instead of waiting until the next morning.

"I am glad that you have so decided, Pawnee Bill, for I am anxious to get these dispatches through as soon as possible," responded the colonel.

Then he added:

"He sent me word by the guard, when he was relieved from duty, that he had arranged his affairs with you, and also made you heir to what he left."

"Yes, sir, and I will take his horse and outfit with me, for I have a weakness for fine animals."

Then Pawnee Bill left the headquarters to see that all were in perfect readiness for his departure within an hour's time, when he knew it would be time to start.

Pawnee Bill really felt the deepest sympathy for the condemned man.

He did not believe him the guilty one that the Surgeon Scout had accused him of being, for it must be remembered that the youth had really heard nothing of the man's history.

Had he thought him what he was said to be, he would never have raised a finger to effect his rescue.

But, believing him to be more sinned against than sinning, a creature of misfortune, he had determined to help him, remembering all that he had done for him when he was a prisoner to the Indians.

"They will believe him dead, and I will urge him to go from here and seek a new home, so that he never will be seen again by those here who knew him."

"I will give him a little money and he can make a fortune for himself in another land."

"If I am doing wrong, my heart prompts me to act and I cannot help it."

So argued Pawnee Bill, and who can blame him, believing as he did that the renegade was not as bad as he was painted.

At the appointed time he received his dispatches from the colonel, and mounting his own horse, and with the renegade's in lead, his own and the dog following, he awaited the coming of the execution guard with his prisoner.

They soon came, with no roll of the drum, only the guard, the firing squad, the lieutenant and the prisoner.

Pawnee Bill dropped in the rear and followed the party, while the soldiers of the fort gazed with interest upon the little party as it marched silently away.

The prisoner still wore his costume as a chief, having refused to take it off, and marched with a firm, elastic step between his two guards.

In the front marched the lieutenant, and the firing squad came behind, with Pawnee Bill bringing up the rear.

The coffin, a rude pine box, had already been taken out to the hanging-ground, and as the prisoner entered the timber he saw that his grave had been dug.

But, whatever his thoughts were he did not flinch, and firmly walked to his stand at the head of the grave.

The sun was going below the horizon, and Lieutenant Delorme was anxious to have the sad and tragic scene over with, so he at once told the prisoner to take a seat upon his coffin.

"I prefer to stand, sir."

"As you please."

Kent Kingdon stepped to the head of his coffin and stood upright.

The firing guard was then placed in position, the lieutenant stepped to one side, and the two guards, their services at an end, stood not far away gazing upon the scene.

Pawnee Bill sat upon his horse nearby, his eyes turned upon the face of the disguised renegade.

"Prisoner, have you aught to say before I give the order to fire?" asked Lieutenant Delorme.

"Nothing."

The word was firmly uttered and the prisoner looked squarely into the faces of the men who were to fire upon him.

Not a sign had Pawnee Bill given him that he had done as he had asked him, and so he was wholly ignorant of whether the rifles were to usher him out of life into death or not.

He certainly showed that he was a man of wonderful nerve under the fearful ordeal through which he was passing.

"Attention, squad!"

At the command the squad stood at attention, and then came the other orders, slowly given until the four rifles sounded as one when the order came:

"Fire!"

Down by the side of his coffin sunk the renegade chief, and stepping forward the guards quickly took off his irons, while Lieutenant Delorme bent over and glanced at him closely.

"The bullets tore into his breast, for here is where they entered, he said, looking at the rent place in his hunting-shirt, which was stained with blood.

Pawnee Bill started at this, and gazed fixedly at the man as he lay with upturned face in the gathering twilight.

Was he indeed dead?

Had Lieutenant Delorme discovered that the rifles had been tampered with and reloaded them?

The renegade certainly appeared to be dead.

But the guards cared not to tarry in that gloomy spot, with darkness creeping upon them, and they hastily placed the limp form in the coffin, nailed on the top and lowered it into the grave.

Then the dirt was quickly thrown in and bidding Pawnee Bill good-by the officer marched off with his men, while the young scout rode away in the gathering darkness.

But as soon as the soldiers could no longer be discovered in the distance, he rode rapidly back to the timber, hitched his horses, and unrolling some blankets from his pack, took therefrom a shovel, which he had obtained at the fort.

Rapidly he threw out the loose dirt, and as the grave was scarcely three feet deep, soon came to the coffin.

The lid was soon pried off and the form within dragged out of the grave.

The form was limp, the flesh still warm, but life seemed extinct.

Placing his hand upon the breast Pawnee Bill found the torn hunting-shirt, and he felt that it was damp, as from blood-stain.

But beneath the costume he felt a hard substance, and a search revealed that it was the steel shirt that the renegade had spoken of.

But there was no hole in it over the heart, and none could be found elsewhere, so that no fatal wound had been received, that was certain.

Still the man remained seemingly unconscious, and Pawnee Bill muttered:

"He is dead, for the grave has smothered the life out of him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

BACK TO LIFE.

FOR some minutes Pawnee Bill did not know just what to do.

He felt certain that the man was dead, and he had doubtless died in the grave, for there was no sign of a wound upon him.

He always carried with him a small lantern, and yet he dared not light it, for fear it might be seen from the fort.

"Well, I must rebury him, for I have done my duty and have kept my pledge to him," he muttered.

He was about to put the man back into the grave when he discovered that he still seemed very warm for a dead man.

"The body holds its warmth for a long time."

"I will wait yet a while."

"Ah! I remember now that he said he would take a liquid that would render him unconscious, and I recall his having raised his hands to his lips before reaching the timber."

"It may be after all that he is not dead."

As he spoke he felt the body move, and at once he set to work to revive him.

Taking his canteen he bathed his face and forced some water between his teeth.

Soon a shudder passed over the form and it was not long before the renegade sat up and said:

"Who are you?"

"Pawnee Bill."

"Ah! I recall now that he said he would take a liquid that would render him unconscious, and I recall his having raised his hands to his lips before reaching the timber."

"I forgot what you said about it, and was thinking of burying you again, when you began to revive."

The man shuddered and said:

"It was a close call for me; but I owe you more than I can ever repay."

"Forget it, but remember to keep your promise."

"Now let me fill up the grave again, and then you had better be starting on your way, for you are in a dangerous neighborhood."

"I know that, and am anxious to be off."

"You have the paper I gave you?"

"Yes, here it is."

"Did you read it?"

"I did not."

"Good!" said the man earnestly, and Pawnee Bill noticed his manner of speaking, and recalled it afterward.

The grave was then filled in again, and made up so as to look as though it had not been disturbed, and the renegade then walked with Pawnee Bill to where the horses were, and soon after the two rode away from the timber together.

"Here we part," said the renegade, when they had gone several miles together.

"You return to the Sioux?"

"Yes."

"Well, remember that there is to be no more Sioux raids that you can prevent."

"I will not forget it."

"There is one warning that I should give you."

"Well?"

"The Surgeon Scout is on the trail of those chiefs, to see that they meant no trickery."

"Ah! and you would warn me that he is between me and the Sioux camp?"

"Yes, so avoid him, and you must keep a bright lookout not to meet him."

"I will, for he is one I would not care to face, though I do not fear any man."

"You say that he took the chiefs' trail?"

"He went after them to see if they had any bands of braves in the neighborhood."

"You know that we have not."

"True, and when the Surgeon Scout finds this out, he will doubtless return to the fort; but I tell you this to have you avoid meeting him."

"Never fear; but let me again thank you and say good-by."

Pawnee Bill grasped the outstretched hand, and then the two parted, the renegade striking off toward the Sioux country and the young scout starting upon his way to the nearest fort, for he was to leave dispatches at each outpost as he went along, just as he had done on his ride northward.

It was late in the night when Pawnee Bill camped, and he had ridden along at a good pace, so that his horses needed rest.

Guard was also tired, but not too much so to be on the watch, and with his faithful companion on duty Pawnee Bill felt no fear of being surprised, for he knew that the dog would scent danger a long way off and arouse him.

Soon after daybreak he had breakfasted, and was again on the way.

All day long he kept up a steady pace, and at night reached the outpost he sought.

Here he remained for the night, and delivering his dispatches, went on his way early the following morning.

Toward evening he knew that he was drawing near a settlement, but as it was yet miles away and his horses, Guard and himself needed rest, he decided to camp early, cook a good supper, and get a good night's sleep.

Before him was a hill, cone-like in shape, with bare sides and trees on the summit.

A canyon penetrated it, and down this a small rivulet, formed by springs, flowed.

It was a snug place for a camp, and so Pawnee Bill decided to remain there.

Before entering the canyon, he hitched his horses and ascended the hill on foot.

From the point of observation he obtained he saw down into the basin, which formed the center of the hill, and out of which the canyon led.

There were small trees there, a large spring, and no better place could he have found for a camp.

But his eyes suddenly fell upon a human form.

He saw a man crouching down among a pile of rocks and taking out of a hole some object—what he could not tell.

"It is an Indian," he muttered.

Then the man stood up, and at his feet were several dark objects.

These he picked up and walked down the hill to the basin, carrying them in his arms.

"Why, it is the renegade!" cried Pawnee Bill, when he beheld him.

"He said he was going to the Sioux village, and he has come here."

"And this is the neighborhood of his old ranch."

"What can he have come here for, and what was it that he took out from among the rocks?"

"They looked like bags."

"I wonder if he has any treasure hidden here."

"I know he was accused of being the leader of the Toll-takers, but he said he was not guilty of the charge."

"Yet he certainly has gotten something that was in hiding among those rocks, and then why is he here when I supposed he was on his way to the Sioux village?"

"I will ride into the canyon, pretending I did not know that he was there."

So saying Pawnee Bill returned to his horses, mounted and rode around to the entrance of the canyon.

Then Guard at once scented the trail of the renegade, and started ahead at a run.

But a word from his master recalled him to his side, and soon after Pawnee Bill was in the basin, or hollow in the hill.

There he saw the renegade, who just then discovered him.

He noticed that the renegade seemed uneasy at seeing him, and when he came forward he said:

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Pawnee Bill, for I had no idea that you were near here."

"Nor did I believe you were within a hundred miles of this spot, for I thought that you were going to return to the Sioux village," responded Pawnee Bill.

"I did intend to; but I met some Indians whom I supposed were Pawnees and they drove me in this direction."

"I eluded them an hour ago, and came here to camp for the night."

"I just dismounted from my horse as you came up the canyon, or I would have seen you."

Pawnee Bill knew that the man was lying to him, for it had been nearly half an hour since he had seen him on the rocks over on the other side of the canyon.

Then his horse was unsaddled and staked out, and the bags which the renegade had taken from the

rocks lay near his saddle, and he quickly threw his coat over them.

"I don't think they could have been Pawnees, for they do not hunt so high up as this," calmly remarked Pawnee Bill.

"Well, they were not Sioux, so what other Indians could they be?" and then the renegade changed the subject quickly by saying:

"Well, will you camp here for the night, Pawnee Bill?"

"Yes, I came here for that purpose."

"Then we will camp together."

Pawnee Bill felt that there was something wrong, for he knew that there were no Pawnees near, and the renegade would not have fled from the Sioux.

Then he did not speak of what he had taken from the rocks.

But, pretending to act as though he had no suspicion of him, he staked his horses out and built a fire, when the two got supper, and then made up their blankets for a night's rest.

The renegade was careful to make his a little way apart from Pawnee Bill, and the latter observed this.

Saying that he was very sleepy, Pawnee Bill soon laid down, while the renegade said that he would sit up for awhile, as he was not tired.

Then Pawnee Bill lay with his eyes open and watched his companion, though feigning to be asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT SURGEON POWELL SAW.

WHEN the renegade felt sure that Pawnee Bill was asleep, he rose softly, and taking his coat off of the bags, where he had thrown it, he began to tie them firmly together, and roll them in one of his blankets.

This being done, he secured the blanket firmly to his saddle, and then also lay down to rest, Guard having gone down the canyon to sleep at a word from his master, to give warning of danger if there was any one approaching to disturb their repose.

But the night passed away without an alarm, and the renegade and Pawnee Bill arose early.

The former made no remark about the bags being rolled up in the blanket, but asked:

"Do you go right on to the forts?"

"Yes, and you?"

"Oh, I shall make my way to the Sioux village, and, as I promised you, will do all in my power to get them on a peace footing with the whites."

"When I have done so I will not be afraid of showing myself at the forts and provin that I am not the bad man they accuse me of being."

"I hope you will be able to do so," replied Pawnee Bill, and soon after the two men once more parted and went their respective ways.

In the mean time the Surgeon Scout had left the fort, as has been seen, to trail the six chiefs on their return to their village.

He had an idea that they had not come alone to the fort, but had in waiting near a large body of braves.

He found that they took the straight trail toward their village.

But still he held on along the trail until he was sure that they had no party of braves in waiting.

Then he started upon his return, and in going through a little hill country suddenly beheld a band of red-skins approaching.

Instantly he sought the nearest shelter for himself and horse, and congratulated himself upon not having been seen by the keen-eyed Indians, for there were fully two-score of them.

They also had a number of led ponies, bearing packs, and the Surgeon Scout knew that they were a hunting party returning to their village with their game.

As he watched them he saw them come to a halt, and with his glass he reconnoitered them carefully.

"They are Sioux and evidently from old Thunder's village; but I dare not trust them, for though they might treat me well in their camp, before their chief, they would be only too glad to take my scalp if they found me here."

"Hal! what's up now?"

The last remark of the Surgeon Scout was on account of seeing that some cause of excitement had arisen among the Indians.

He saw them all glancing in one direction, and then he discovered a horseman coming toward them, but yet quite a distance away.

Instantly he turned his glass upon the strange horseman, when he saw that he was an Indian, from his head-dress a chief and that he was mounted upon a white horse.

"That looks to me very like that infernal renegade," he muttered.

"Can it be that after all he has again escaped death?"

"Not one of the six chiefs turned off from the trail, and besides I left them far from here, so it cannot be one of them."

"As I live! I believe they have let the renegade escape."

"Oh! if I had only come across him before he saw that band of Sioux, I would have had it out with him very quickly."

"Yes, he comes from the direction of the fort, and I verily believe it is Kent Kingdon."

The horseman had now joined the band of red-skins, and, with his glass the Surgeon Scout could see that he was telling some exciting story to the braves, all of whom had gathered about him.

Then the party came toward the hill, to camp for the night, and the Surgeon Scout was compelled to beat a hasty retreat.

He tried in vain to find a hiding-place near, that he might return and reconnoiter their camp; but he was unable to do so and, feeling that if the chief

who had joined the hunting-party was really the renegade that he was safe, he went on his way back to the fort.

"If he has escaped, I will again trust myself in the Sioux village and bring him to justice," he said as he rode along through the darkness.

Anxious to know if the chief was really the renegade, the Surgeon Scout kept on his way through the night, halting only a few times to rest his horse, and arrived at the fort just before dawn.

The sentinel halted him, but he gave his name and was admitted at once within the stockade.

"Has that renegade chief escaped?" was his first question to the sentinel.

"No, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir, for he was executed."

"There was no mistake?"

"No, sir."

"When was he executed?"

"The evening of the day he arrived, sir."

"Was he hanged?"

"No, sir, he was shot."

"Again I ask you if you are certain?"

"Yes, sir, for I was one of the execution squad."

"Ah! and you are sure you killed him?"

"He fell dead at our fire, sir."

"And was buried?"

"Yes, sir, we put him in a coffin and buried him."

"Who commanded at the execution?"

"Lieutenant Delorme, sir."

"Well, I suppose it is as you say; but I saw a man strangely like him at sunset last night."

The soldier was silent a moment and then said:

"You don't believe in ghosts, sir?"

"Not I."

"Well, sir, I saw the renegade fall dead, and helped bury him, and the colonel issued an order regarding his execution."

"Then I must be satisfied, Bennett; for the chief I saw was strangely like him, as was the horse he rode like the animal the renegade rode here," and the surgeon went on to his quarters, his mind greatly relieved, and tired out after his arduous ride was soon fast asleep.

When he awoke late in the afternoon he reported to the colonel what he had seen, but was told that Kent Kingdon had certainly been shot to death.

"If I was superstitious I would vow that I had seen his ghost," said Frank Powell with an earnestness that showed that he was really impressed by what he had seen.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SURGEON'S STORY.

SEVERAL months after the escape from death of Kent Kingdon, Pawnee Bill again visited the fort with dispatches.

The Sioux had been on the war-path almost ever since their pretended peace mission to the fort, and many a deadly combat had they fought with the soldiers.

That the renegade still lived no one at the fort had any idea, for Surgeon Powell even no longer held a suspicion of such a thing being possible.

On his way to the fort with dispatches, Pawnee Bill happened again at twilight to be in the vicinity of the canyon where he had camped with the renegade.

"I will camp there to-night," he said to himself, and soon after he rode into the little hollow and dismounted.

He had staked out his horses, for, as was his wont, he always carried an extra animal, and was going to build a fire when a growl from Guard put him on the alert for danger.

"What is it, Guard?" he called out.

"Call off your dog if you do not wish him killed!" cried a voice up the hillside.

A word to Guard caused him to come to his master's side, and then down the hill came a man, rifle in hand.

He was a large man, with a long, full beard and very long hair, white as snow.

Both hair and beard were bushy and matted, so that his face was almost hidden from view.

He was dressed in a complete suit of buckskin, much the worse for wear, and he wore moccasins.

having accepted the invitation of the old hermit to stop in and see him whenever he was passing near his retreat.

Arriving at the fort Surgeon Powell asked him to accept the hospitality of his quarters during his stay, and the invitation was readily accepted, for Pawnee Bill had taken a great fancy to the daring officer.

That night as they sat talking together in the surgeon's quarters, Pawnee Bill noticed that his host seemed ill at ease.

At last Surgeon Powell said:

"Pawnee Bill, you witnessed the execution of Kent Kingdon I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw him shot, and then buried?"

"Yes."

"Well, though Delorme and the soldiers who were there have told me the same thing, do you know that I am going to open his grave to-morrow to see if his remains are really in the coffin?"

Pawnee Bill started and replied:

"You doubt it then, that he was shot?"

"No, but I believe that he was only wounded and must have been buried alive, for I saw a chief once whom I was sure was the renegade, and more, I have a letter here, received to-day from Lieutenant Carter Cameron, an old friend of mine who was once stationed here, telling me of a robbery committed in the house of a friend there, one Doctor Manners, and that he saw the robber and could swear that it was that man Kent Kingdon."

"Surgeon Powell, will you tell me all that you know of that man Kent Kingdon?" suddenly asked Pawnee Bill.

"I'll tell you what I know of him.

"He was from Texas and his parents were rich, so he went East to college.

"There he killed a fellow-student in a duel, about a lady to whom he had once been engaged, and to whom his victim was then engaged.

"He fled to escape the gallows and became a gambler in the mining-camps.

"By his skill in trickery he became known as the Card King, and won large sums of money, while everywhere he went he left graves behind him.

"He inveigled a young girl into marrying him, after secretly killing her father, a miner, whom she had gone West to visit, and he forced this poor woman to become a gambler and she bore the name of the Queen of Diamonds.

"He broke her heart and she died in a mining-camp, for I attended her in her last days.

"He then fled and became a ranchero, bought a ranch, stocked it and, under his own name, was considered a splendid fellow by the settlers, who made him captain of the Regulators, when he was secretly chief of the Toll-takers, an outlaw band formed from his own cowboys.

"By a strange fate the father of the student whom he killed in a duel, lost his fortune and settled near his ranch, and he saved the life of the dead man's sister.

"Not knowing his devilries, the girl's parents let the life saved weigh against the life taken, and the maiden was fascinated by him and when her father moved to St. Louis to prevent her marrying him he followed and she secretly became his wife.

"Then he brought her back to her old home, and one day I had a letter from her father begging me to rescue his child from the devil who was her husband.

"I went on his trail, and I found, as I at first believed, a youth on his track.

"But it was a woman, the one whom he had broken with and then killed her lover, Horace Manners.

"She was the sister of Lieutenant Cameron, of whom I spoke, and she let it be thought that she had committed suicide, while she had taken the trail of vengeance, disguised as a man, to hunt him down.

"She trailed him through all his villainies, and at last tracked him to his home.

"Well, Lieutenant Cameron was supporting me with his company of cavalry, and we ambushed the Toll-takers and defeated them.

"But Kent Kingdon escaped and fled to the Sioux, and thither I followed him, for you remember I saved the old chief's life and so dared to go there.

"I thought that I had killed him, but I was mistaken.

"Lieutenant Cameron had in the mean time gone to the ranch where Kingdon held his poor wife and Camille Cameron a prisoner, for he had captured and recognized the woman who was a Nemesis upon his track, and they were brought to the fort.

The lieutenant escorted his sister and Mrs. Kingdon to St. Louis, and falling in love with the young widow, as he believed, he got orders to remain on duty there.

"When Kent Kingdon came here as a Sioux chief I wrote Cameron, telling him that I had not killed him as I supposed, but that he had been recognized and shot.

"Now a letter comes to me telling me that the home of Doctor Manners was robbed one night, and that he was visiting there and, in the robber he was sure that he recognized Kent Kingdon.

"He did not, at my request, make known that I had not killed Kingdon in the Sioux village, for there was no need to reopen the wounds in poor Mabel Kingdon's heart and that of his sister.

"But now when he writes that I must be sure that Kingdon is dead, I am determined to see if he is in that grave, for what he stole from the home of Doctor Manners, Cameron writes me, was a map of a gold deposit which the doctor had discovered before leaving and meant some day to work.

"This seemed to prove that it was Kingdon who

committed this robbery, for he knew that the doctor had the map of his gold find.

"Now if that grave is empty, I will track Kent Kingdon down, I vow it!" and the face of Frank Powell showed that he meant all that he said.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PAWNEE BILL'S PLEDGE.

PAWNEE BILL had listened most attentively to the story of the surgeon.

When he knew Kent Kingdon in all his blackness of heart he regretted deeply that he had been the means of giving him the power to commit more wickedness.

"Surgeon Powell," he said, after a few minutes of deep meditation. "I have a secret to tell you."

"Out with it."

"That grave is empty."

The Surgeon Scout sprung to his feet.

"I tell you the truth, sir."

"Then I was right, for that chief was Kent Kingdon, and more, the robber of Doctor Manners's home was also."

"I think you are right, sir."

"I know it; but there was treachery at that execution."

"No, sir; not with Lieutenant Delorme and the soldiers."

"Who, then?"

"I am the guilty one."

"You, Pawnee Bill?"

"Yes, sir; and I will make a clean breast of it."

And the young scout told his story, from his capture by the band of Indians and his rescue in the nick of time by the party of chiefs, at whose head was Kent Kingdon.

"I believed that their mission was one of peace, and so I did not tell you all of his rescue of me, for he begged me not to do so, saying that as I had been captured, and would have been burned to death but for his arrival, you would not believe their professions of peace.

"So I kept his secret, even when you recognized him."

"When I visited him in the guard-house I felt pity for him, and not believing him guilty, nor knowing his character as I know it now, I was anxious to save his life, as he promised to return to the Sioux and force them to make peace.

"I took the cartridges out of the rifles, and he, when fired upon, had torn holes in his hunting-shirt and stained it with blood, biting his finger to make it bleed, he told me, and no one doubted but that he was dead, especially as he had taken a stupefying drug.

"It was then who released him, and I met him afterward when I least expected, and I know that he lied to me."

"I cannot blame you, Pawnee Bill, knowing as I do that you considered him innocent, and owed your life to him."

"He is a fascinating man, possessing wonderful personal magnetism, and he cleverly deceived you, as he has hundreds of others.

"But he is alive, and I will devote my life to hunting him down."

"No, Surgeon Powell, for as I allowed him to go free, I will now hunt him to the bitter end."

"But, my dear young friend, I—"

"No, Surgeon Powell, I have your pledge, sir, and you will not break it."

"But where will you look for him?"

"I have an idea of where I can find him, sir."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir, but what you have told me to-night leads me to think so."

"And when will you take his trail?"

"To-morrow, sir."

"Can I not go with you in the search?"

"No, sir, for as I did the mischief let me be the one to undo it."

"He is a desperate man to corner."

"I will hold the winning hand when I meet him, sir."

"And when do you expect to accomplish the big task you have cut out for yourself?"

"Within ten days," was the confident reply of the young scout.

The next morning, true to his pledge, Pawnee Bill started upon his trail of revenge, and Surgeon Powell, when he bade him farewell, and saw him ride away, said to himself:

"Pawnee Bill knows more than he has admitted to me about Kent Kingdon."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PLEDGE KEPT.

WHEN Pawnee Bill left the fort he started off as though he knew just where he was going to find Kent Kingdon.

He held on his way steadily during the day, camped at night, and the following day did not break camp until late in the afternoon.

Then he set out once more, and night found him some miles away from the hill in which the old hermit had built his cabin.

He approached the spot quietly, and leaving his horses some distance away, under the care of Guard, went on foot up the canyon.

He approached the cabin cautiously, and saw through several small crevices between the logs a light twinkling forth.

Climbing up several feet on the rough ends of the logs, he reached a position from whence he could gaze into the cabin through one of these chinks, and what he saw seemed to satisfy him, for he at once got down from his perch and returned through the canyon to where he had left his horses.

Mounting once more he rode on directly into the canyon, and approaching the cabin gave a hail.

There was a moment of delay, and a voice called out:

"Ho! who hails?"

"Pawnee Bill."

"All right, stake your horse and come on."

A few moments after Pawnee Bill entered the cabin and was warmly greeted by the old hermit, who was getting supper for him.

The youth ate with little relish, and pleading fatigue soon after wrapped his blanket about him and threw himself down upon a bear robe to sleep.

But sleep he did not, though he pretended to do so.

He saw the old hermit rise and throw off his outer clothing preparatory to going to his cot, while Guard, who lay on the hearth, woke up and eyed him for a moment, as though to see if he meant harm to his master.

Pawnee Bill had asked to let his dog sleep in the cabin, as if he sniffed danger he would at once come and waken him.

The young scout had noticed that the hermit had thrown some wood on the fire, as though to keep a light in the cabin, and had hung his belt of arms upon the bar of the door, against which he leaned his rifle.

When he felt certain that the hermit was asleep he had crept noiselessly out of bed and suddenly leveling at him his revolvers Pawnee Bill cried:

"You are my prisoner! Hands up or my dog shall tear you to pieces!"

The hermit half-sprung to his feet, but Guard faced him with grinning teeth and an angry growl, and the revolvers of Pawnee Bill covered his heart.

"Is this a joke?" he asked, savagely.

"Hold up your hands, sir, and you shall see!"

The man obeyed and stepping quickly forward Pawnee Bill continued:

"Guard, at his throat if he moves!"

The scout then drew from his pocket with one hand a pair of steel spring handcuffs and slipped them on the wrists of the hermit, while he said:

"Kent Kingdon, I have run you to earth, you see."

For the first time in his life Kent Kingdon quailed before a human being.

"You know me?" he hissed.

"Yes, for I happened to hear your story only a couple of nights ago, and then I remembered that the hermit who dwelt here had a beard and hair that looked very much as though they were false.

"I recalled also a pair of fascinating eyes, some weapons which I thought I had seen before and set you down as my man, so I came here to find out."

"And you, whose life I saved, now seek mine?"

"I do, for I know you, and I shall take you to the fort with me."

"Boy, I have hidden away among these rocks a fortune in gold, and I'll share it with you if you will let me go."

"I cannot be bought."

"You do not believe me?"

"Oh, yes, for when I met you here, after rescuing you, I saw you taking some bags out of the rocks."

"Ah! you saw that?"

"Yes."

"Well, no one can find where it is now hidden, and more, there is a mine here which I believe will pan out well, though so far it has yielded me but little."

"I will give you a share in it."

"You refer to the mine found by Doctor Manners and the map which you went to St. Louis for after your escape through my aid and stole from his house."

"Boy, who in Satan's name are you, that knows this?"

"One who has pledged himself to hunt you down, and I have kept my pledge, too."

"You refuse my offer?"

"I do."

"Well, I will die with my lips sealed as to where my gold is hidden, and little will you get out of the old mine."

"I had hoped it would pan out well, and then I would have taken sweet revenge on all whom I bitterly hate."

"But it seems I have gotten to the end of my rope at last."

"You will soon get there, for I start at once with you to the fort."

Tying the man to the door, and leaving Guard to watch him, Pawnee Bill went off after his horses, and half an hour after started off with the man whom he had tracked down.

It was the next night when he reached the fort, and Frank Powell cried as he saw that he had his man:

"You have kept your pledge, Pawnee Bill, and this time I shall attend the funeral of Kent Kingdon so as to be sure there is no mistake."

The next day the career of Kent Kingdon, the Card King, ended, for he was hanged just outside the stockade, and Surgeon Powell himself pronounced him dead before he was cut down, while, after his burial, he and Pawnee Bill stood guard over his grave for several hours.

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